

NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRD WATCHERS

Vol. 2, No. 1

January 1962

The Editor wishes readers a very Happy New Year, and hopes that they will have many pleasant bird watching experiences during 1962.

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PROPOSED INDIAN ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Minutes of the meeting held at Bombay on 16.12.1961

A meeting of persons interested in forming an Indian Ornithological Society was held at Bombay on 16 December 1961. The following persons were present:

Dr. Salim Ali, F.N.I.

Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Zool. Survey of India
Mr. D.J. Panday
Mr. J.C. Daniel
Mr. B.G. Ghate
Mr. Udayshankar Rao
Mr. Jal Sett
Mr. Rustom Sett
Mr. B.A. Palkhiwalla
Mr. J.J. Mistry
Mr. V.K. Chari
Mr. V.C. Ambedkar

Dr. B.R. Dave
Mr. Zafar Futehally
Mr. J.S. Serrao
Mr. P.W. Soman
Mr. J. Gabriel
Mr. M.R. Raut
Mr. Amir Ali
Mr. Daniel Mathew
Mr. Jamshed Panday
Mrs. Zafar Futehally
Miss Mehra Dubash
Miss S. Padma

Letters regretting inability to attend the meeting were received from:

Mr. N.L. Khanolkar, Principal, Shri Sivaji Military School
K.S. Lavkumar, Rajkumar College, Rajkot
Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, Govt. College, Chittur
Y.S. Shivraj Kumar, The Palace, Jasdan.

Suggestions regarding the formation of the Indian Ornithological Society were received from

Dr. J.C. George | now in Washington, U.S.A.
Dr. R.M. Naik |
Mrs. Jamal Ara, Ranchi, Bihar
Mrs. Desirée Proud, British Embassy, Nepal
Major W.W.A. Phillips, England
Dr. J.P. Joshua, Liberia
Mr. Yusuf Patel, West Africa.

A telegram of good wishes was received from Mr. R.A.S. Melliush, Oxford University Press, Madras.

P r o c e e d i n g s

Dr. Salim Ali was elected Chairman of the meeting. He requested Mr. Zafar Futehally to give a brief resume of the various suggestions that had been made by readers about the formation of the Society, and the steps that have so far been taken for the fulfil-

ment of the objectives.

Mr. Futehally referred briefly to the various points of view put forward in the letters received. The suggestions reflected the varied status of the persons making them ranging from well-known ornithologists who looked down with a slight contempt on the amateur bird watcher to the novice who was excited if he recognized a parakeet. But this great divergence of talent in the group did not according to the speaker necessarily prevent the formation of a scientific society of this kind. In fact the serious ornithologist was helpless without the data provided by amateur bird watchers throughout the country.

The speaker referred to a letter which he had addressed to the Bombay Natural History Society enquiring whether it would be prepared to establish a Bird Wing which would produce the Newsletter and undertake the same type of activity which the new Ornithological Society was expected to do. This approach was made to the Society in view of the feeling of a section of the readers that forming of a new Society might lead to a dissipation of the existing limited ornithological talent in the country. The minutes of the meeting of the Bombay Natural History Society which answered this letter were read out at the meeting.

There was then a general discussion in which several members participated. Dr. Biswas and Mr. Ghate felt that a Bird Wing of the Bombay Natural History Society would not be the answer to the problem of arousing interest in birds over the entire country.

Miss M. Dubash and some others felt it would be better to form a bird watchers' club which would organize field excursions, and arrange for talks by experts so that a large number of people would be basically equipped to undertake a study of birds.

The Chairman in summing up the views expressed in the meeting said that there was force in the contention that a little more spade work should be done before the Ornithological Society was formed. He said that for the time being the Newsletter for Bird Watchers would be kept going and perhaps after another year a more definite decision could be taken about the formation of the Society. He then formally announced that the following decisions were taken at the meeting:

- 1) That the Newsletter for Bird Watchers would be continued to be edited and produced by Mr. Zafar Futehally, and would be distributed to anybody interested for a subscription of Rs5/- per annum in India, and Rs5/- plus postage to readers abroad.
- 2) That the following persons be asked to join the Editorial Board of the Newsletter

Dr. Salim Ali, F.N.I.,
33 Pali Hill, Bandra, Bombay 50

K.S. Lavkumar,
Rajkumar College, Rajkot

Y.S. Shivrajkumar,
The Palace, Jasdan, Saurashtra

Dr. R.M. Naik,
(Presently) Michigan State University, East
Lansing, Michigan, U.S.A.

Mrs. Usha Ganguli,
10 Cavalry Lines, Delhi

Major D.J.C. Haig-Thomas,
Coombergram T.E., P.O. Kumbhir,
Cachar Dist., Assam.

Mr. E.D. Ayari,
Bengal Natural Hist. Soc., Darjeeling.
Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.,
Naval Headquarters, New Delhi
Dr. Biswamoy Biswas,
Indian Museum, Zoological Survey of India,
Calcutta
Mr. Joseph George,
Forest Research Institute,
42 Trevor Road, Dehra Dun, U.P.
Mrs. Jamal Ara,
4 European Bachelors' Qrs.,
Doranda, Hinoo P.O., Ranchi, Bihar
Prof. K.K. Neelakantan,
Govt. College, Chittur, Kerala State
Mr. Zafar Futehally, Editor
Bombay

The regional editors would be expected to publicize the Newsletter as much as they can and establish close liaison with local bird watching clubs, zoological departments of colleges, schools, forest departments, and others who in their opinion would help the objectives for which the Newsletter was kept going. They would send periodic reports about their activities to the Editor of the Newsletter.

The meeting terminated with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

PHEASANT-TAILED JACANAS AT KALINA

A Sunday morning's birding accidentally brought us on 23 July 1961 to a tank adjoining the R.C. Church in Kalina (Greater Bombay). Seeing Pheasant-tailed Jacanas preparing to breed in it, we decided to pry into their family affairs. From then on the tank became a place of our daily pilgrimage. Every morning we reached it by 6.30 to make such observations as we could during the two odd hours snatched before we proceeded to our daily work. All our week-ends and public holidays were scheduled for dawn-to-dusk observations at the tank, and for the simple experiments in the course of the observations.

The aquatic vegetation of the tank consisted of isolated Eichhornia clumps, dotting along the centre of the tank for about three-fourths of the length. To the right of these (west) grew waterlily, Limnanthemum, and unidentified grass and reeds. Open water lay to the left (east) of the dotted line of Eichhornia and on the south for a quarter of the tank's area, and in such areas left unencroached by the above vegetation, grew submerged about an inch or so below the surface of water thick matted hydrilla mass which made either wading or negotiating a boat difficult. Neptunia (oleracea ?), and Ipomoea aquatica grew sparsely along northern edges of the tank.

The five males out of total of 7 Pheasant-tailed Jacanas present in the tank had established nesting territories and were now working on the nest sites -- tugging at, and collecting nesting material and arranging it on the nest. The first egg in the tank made its appearance on the 30th of July. The numbers of the breeders increased to 13 individuals -- 9 males and 4 females -- as the breeding season progressed, and we were afforded the opportunity of studying 11 clutches 2 of which we suspect to be repeat-performances of the two unfortunate males whose nests were pilfered early during incubation.

We made an attempt to colour stain the birds to study the role of the sexes, and repeat-performances of females and of the males, if any. Mist nets were put up across the middle of the tank, but the attempts at capturing the birds failed. A Pheasant-tailed entangled helplessly in the net would free itself with a few jerks of its body and fly off before we could reach it either by swimming across, or in a boat. Our identification of the male and female had to be based on size dimorphism, sexes in these birds being otherwise identical. However, as observations progressed we were to stumble on a clue to tell the sexes apart at nest. It was the trim condition of the female's tail whose four long tail feathers show up prominently throughout her stay in a nesting territory and at nest in contrast to the male's. The reason for this distinction is the incessant work the male puts in at nest. This brings his tail in contact with water, wetting, and sticking together the four feathers and showing them up as a single one. The constant habit of the female of drooping her tail and turning backwards to pick up each tail feather at the base and work it up to the tip in her beak (preening them) adds to her tail's trimness.

Before we give a summary of the observations, we must record our appreciation of the encouragement we received from Dr. Salim Ali. He was personally visiting the site to guide our work, and cine picture some of its stages. Mr. Zafar Futehally took interest in the work, and loaned his dhingy without which close

observations would not have been possible. The Fathers of the Kalina Church, and St. Mary's High School tolerated us on their premises even though we were a continual source of distraction to the school boys. All of them we thank. A word of appreciation is also due to the Boy Scouts of St. Mary's who were ever ready to roll up their sleeves to assist us in the odd and ends of our work.

A resumé of the family secrets of the species is given below:

1. The male selects a nest territory which he jealously guards from other prospecting males, and works single-handed at nest site.
2. Into such an established territory alights a roving female. If she accepts the working male as her mate, she takes over from him the duty of guarding the territory against intruders. The male continues building as before. Her hostility to rest of her species is observed to be maximum on the first day of pair formation -- often attacking occupants of territories adjacent to hers without provocation, and trying to dislodge them. For this she often summons her mate.
3. On the second day of the pair formation, her jealousy does not extend beyond the limits of her own territory. She spends her time in putting order on the nest, and in chasing of intruders (both males and females).
4. Copulation always takes place in the evening on the third day of pair formation. It may be male-solicited, or female-solicited. In the former case the male performs a precopulatory ceremony of jumping a 2 to 3 feet above and across the back of the female, hovering over her as he does so. This he repeats 6 to 8 times before the act to make her receptive to it. No subsequent copulations were observed in the same pair on the same or following days.
5. The first egg of the clutch appears on the fifth morning from copulation. The female's interest in the clutch ceases with the last egg. She may continue to linger in the territory for a week or so thereafter, occasionally amorously followed by the male. But she was not observed to share in the incubation of the clutch either before completion of the clutch or thereafter. Her defence of the clutch ends with the last egg. Eggs are laid at intervals of 24 hours, between 8.30 and 9 in the morning.
6. Clutches average 4 eggs. Incubation period is 26-27 days from laying of the first egg to its hatching. Eggs hatch in the order laid, there being about one day's interval between hatching of the first and each successive egg. Incubation commences with the first egg.
7. Frequently, when disturbed, and often seemingly without the incubating male shifts the eggs (and not the nest as is popularly believed) to a distance. He does so by holding the pointed end of the egg in his beak and dragging the broad end along the surface of floating leaves and submerged hydrilla, progressing to the new nest backwards.

8. When intruded upon the chicks freeze in response to the father's alarm calls. He feigns injury and attempts to lead the intruder away from the chicks. The chicks behave so from birth up to about 10 days of age. Thereafter, up to attaining flight, the chicks on being alarmed remain floating, submerged in water up to the chin, and hide themselves under leaves of aquatic vegetation. They swim with the legs worked as in walking, and avoid capture by diving and swimming underwater.
9. Flight is attained at the end of the 7th week from hatching, with which parental care ceases.
10. Of the 11 nests of the 1961 season, the first clutch was laid at the end of July, 7 clutches came during August, and three during September.

Detailed observations made during 1961 breeding season will be followed up and confirmed during 1962 for use in a comprehensive paper.

And lastly an appeal. The march of city development schemes, it is rumoured, will in the near future reclaim this tank for construction of a roadway and human settlement. It will be a pity when the tank is no more in existence, for the action will deprive the harmless avian residents of Bombay (Little Grebe also breed therein) of a cradle to bring up their young, and deny bird- and nature students one more place of study within easy, economic reach of city life. The tank's location adjoining the compound of a high school, and in the vicinity of land set aside for the campus of the University of Bombay is sufficient reason that it should be preserved, improved, and given over to these two institutions as a natural laboratory. Such of our readers as may have a say in Bombay's expansion plans would earn a thousand thanks if they were to use their good offices to save the tank from reclamation, and preserve it for nature lovers. For in the coming years very few natural features in the neighbourhood of the city will remain unreclaimed and unspoilt, making it increasingly difficult for the humbler strata of Bombaywalas to reach the far-off places without serious inroads upon their modest means.

J.S. Serrao, & P.B. Shekar

A DAY OF MIST-NETTING, SAURASHTRA

On 16 October, Shivraj Kumar of Jasdan, very kindly arranged a day of Mist-netting for me at Revania tank some 3 miles to the north-west of his country house some 12 miles out from Jasdan. The Hingol Gadh Castle has already become well known by the previous camps conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society and the Virus Research Centre, Poona with the aid of the World Health Organization last autumn, and by our private netting sessions subsequently organized with unqualified success in the region.

We left early in the morning before sunrise with nets, some poles, a spare crowbar and hammer. The rest of the poles for the nets and other heavier gear was already on its way in a cart. In the jeep were Shivraj Kumar, Nirmalkumar, Sasikumar from Kerala, an old student from the M.S. University, Baroda, and an acquaintance from last September's camp, and myself. It is always very pleas-

ant to be up early and out in the morning with the fresh cool air, the first faint light of dawn with luminous stars fading in its pink flush. In the pale headlights of the car, roosting larks and pipits flew up every now and then at our approach and very soon we were there as the first rays of the sun struck the still waters of the lake. Here beside a creek two of us got down to fix nets along the water's edge to try and get some of the multitudes of Short-toed Larks which we had seen descending the morning before to drink. The rest of us went over to the other end of the lake where the incoming river had spread out a rich layer of sand and alluvium and on which grew thickets of babools. There was much shallow water standing around, and this naturally was an attraction to water birds. On trees stranded in the shallow water was a small colony of egrets, and Cattle Egrets were flighting in all directions to forage, while Lesser Egrets were wading in shallow weed-choked water along the margin of the lake. There were also many Black- and White Ibis, Grey Herons, and Darters among them. As we arrived, there was a great rustling sound of awakening Pastors roosting among low thorny shrubs in the water, followed by a burst and a roar of wings as flock upon flock rose high into the pale morning sky to wheel round and speed into all directions on the day's predation in the surrounding fields of millets. The sight was startling as flock upon flock rose and sped across the sky on fast whirring wings. There were here congregated more than a couple of thousand starling, all among a few small babools. But all this was not for our humble nets, and we turned to the task on hand and started stretching out nylon webs between the bushes. The first catch came in almost immediately, and it augured well for it was a Sylvia curruca or, in more day to day language the Indian Lesser Whitethroat, and a winter visitor to this country. Very soon, as I was placing a net on a creek across a wader haunted mudflat, I heard a tremendous uproar of Large Grey Babblers, which they only do when one of their numbers is in trouble, and sure enough there was Sasikumar gingerly tackling two babblers in a close-by net. We let both of them loose as we had decided to band as few residents as possible. Just then Nirmalkumar came along with a rather bulging bag from the lakeside nets, and we hopefully went over to meet him. Unfortunately, they also had started the day with a pair of Large Grey Babblers! In addition to keep spirits up they had had a Wiretailed Swallow to counter-balance our Whitethroat. The bulging bag had a lot of fruit and after the initial disappointment we were soon putting away quantities of fruit and cups of coffee he had also thoughtfully brought along as this was to be our breakfast and lunch combined. Leaving Nirmalkumar to take my place, I started off to the lakeside nets where I hopefully looked forward to seeing flocks upon flocks of Short-toed Larks flying into the nets, but when I got there things were not quite so exciting, for though the birds had arrived, they had for some reason of security known to them alone, had decided to drink from across the creek instead of at their usual place! We got none. However, there was ample compensation to induce further effort in the lovely form of Bluecheeked Bee-eater, flocks of which were circling and dashing after insects over the water, and the low stoney hills around. Holding the lovely creature was worth all the effort, and it was like a reviving shot in the arm to our already languishing enthusiasm. It was about nine, and the sun was well up in the sky, and so there was little likelihood of more larks coming, so we collected the nets and went to the main camp to reinforce the personnel there. Things had not progressed there since I had left, and spirits were down, and even the sight of the Bee-eater could not quite bolster up further cheer, and there were some gloomy suggestions of going

home for lunch. Even the most optimistic among us was ready to comply with the idea, for till then we had in hand only an Acrocephalus dumetorum, another Sylvia curruca, a couple of Anthus trivialis, a Motacilla alba, and from the net on the mudflat, a Ringed Plover which on wing measurement turned out to be the migratory race of the Charadrius dubius.

There were several White Wagtail around and Green Sandpipers which promised a reasonable chance of getting into the nets, and so as all were wavering on whether to pack up or to risk spending an afternoon out, we tossed up like good worshippers of Goddess Chance, and took a round which if it yielded a single bird, we elected to remain and if not to go. It did, and that too a Tree Pipit, and that too from a net out across the sand over a water-hole, so improbably attractive in the vicinity of a large sheet of water that the placing of the net over it had seemed ridiculous. And so we stayed, and sent the car for the lunch. It was a lucky chance, for from this most improbable net came in another Anthus, and another and this was followed by a stream of birds in ones and twos and even in threes as the heat of the day sent them in from the surrounding countryside to slake their thirst, and what was so surprising, all at this little pool among a burning expanse of sand, with a large lake near by. Why they chose only that pool is a mystery, but to us it was a veritable mine of pipits. The other nets now were unimportant and in fact they were just visited on the way from the ringing site to the yielding net. A second one strategically placed over some wet sand near by also started sending in its bird and so the afternoon was spent ringing and collecting these unobstructive migrants. By evening we had crossed the 50 mark, and that after discarding most of the residents.

By sun down, we had on our lists 33 Tree Pipits and as we folded up the nets, the vast flocks of Rosy Pastors had started their inward flighting, and soon there were thousands on near-by babools preparatory to settling down finally for the night. They came in from all sides in direct fast flight, wheeled and dived and with a rush of wings alighted on the trees. At 6 p.m. they started rising again and flighting over the water, they all collected into a few rather medium-sized babools out in the water used by roosting egrets. Soon they were all packed inside the crown of the trees and what a sight they made for ambitious banders (?)

Just then overhead came a flock of the large Bluecheeked Bee-eaters, some two hundred of them, sailing in great circles and rapidly stooping to rise again high into the sky a picture of perfection in the air. Thus they wheeled and circled now 'balling' like swifts, now expanding into undulating bands for more than an hour, and then suddenly the lower birds plummeted down followed by the rest into a large babool standing in shallow water. Very soon they were asleep, and we in our car homeward bound in the darkening gloom of the night.

K.S. Lavkumar

'BIRDS OF NAJAFGARH JHEEL'

Reference Dr. Salim Ali's comments in Newsletter No. 12 on my notes 'Birds of Najafgarh Jheel' (Newsletter No. 11), the following explanatory notes may be useful.

1. Fantail Snipe: I am afraid I have been guilty of some loose writing here as also in the case of point 2

below, and am thankful for this opportunity of putting things right. My field notes made on the spot, are as follows: "Fantail Snipe - approx. total Jheel area 100 birds dispersed ones and twos, marshy ground among loose flocks of other waders; also seen on wing". The note referred to by Dr. Salim Ali merely says 'Fantail Snipe: (100) in mixed company on marshy ground' which is both misleading and unhelpful.

I must confess that I have not identified Ruff and Reeve on any of my visits to the Jheel. I always look for size of bill for identification of Waders and the identification in this case also, without any doubt in my own mind, was on this basis.

2. Small Skylark and Redwinged Bush Lark: This too is a bad case of loose writing. There is no doubt in my mind regarding the identity of the two species though I agree that to equate the aerial performance of the two is asking for trouble.

I may mention that during subsequent visits on 15.x.61 and 15.xi.61 the Crested Lark was also seen in fairly large numbers in the drier areas.

3. Rain Quail: My identification of this bird was made from field notes on plumage and these specifically mention "Black breast and belly", as noticed in flight and on ground. The description of the Bush Quail, black in the upper plumage which was certainly missing in the species observed.

I must apologise to the editor for this confusion and am now hoping for some good samaritan to extract the chestnuts out of the fire!

Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.

THE BNHS/WHO BIRD MIGRATION FIELD
PROJECT

Note on an exploratory tour in Assam - 11-29 Nov. 1961

In view of the meagreness of our knowledge on bird migration in NE. India, I thought it desirable to explore suitable areas in that part of the country for a study of seasonal bird movements. Accompanied by Mr. E.P. Gee of Shillong I visited these areas between 11 and 29th November 1961. The following is a brief report of my visit.

JATINGA (c. 2000 ft.): This is a small settlement or village in the North Cachar hills about 4 miles distant from the sub-divisional headquarters Haflong (c. 25° N x 93° E), at the head of Jatinga Valley running roughly N. & S. The place has acquired a wide reputation for the large numbers of 'migratory' birds killed by the inhabitants at bright lights exposed outside their houses during certain seasons of the year. On this account Jatinga was recommended to us as worth investigation for the proposed extension of the migration field project to Assam. Thanks to the kindness and good offices of Mr. Gee I was enabled to visit the place in his company between 23 and 29 November. We motored down the 250 odd miles from Shillong through Garampani in his Jeep mostly over narrow winding and spectacular contour roads, largely through magnificent lofty

evergreen hill forest. Unfortunately here also the timing was wrong. The most favourable period for the bird catching activity at Jatinga is said to be between the middle of August and the end of October (i.e. during the monsoon), the best month being September. Nevertheless we visited the actual spots where the operations had been carried out as lately as a few weeks before, and picked up a quantity of feathers strewn about the place in an attempt to identify some of the victims of these holocausts. From Mr. E.W. Suchiang, an intelligent young Khasi resident of Jatinga, who has himself participated in the 'sport' for many years, the following particulars were obtained.

A successful night is one that is dark and moonless, cloudy and overcast, preferably with a light drizzle, and with heavy mist or fog near the ground, and wind blowing S. to N., i.e. against the flow of migration. If the wind direction is not right no birds will come to the Petromaxes, bonfires, or flares. The light is screened on the southern side for the hunter to remain invisible to the birds as they fly in from N. Under the requisite conditions the birds are attracted to the lights in large numbers. All the inmates of Jatinga village sally forth with their Petromaxes or flares and sticks to kill the birds with, and also those of the outlying hamlets and homesteads, in order to gather in this harvest of bird meat. The movement is confined to the immediate vicinity of Jatinga only, and even 2 miles further away, in apparently identical situations, no birds come to the lights. During a season several thousand birds may be taken. As many as 5-600 birds are often killed in a single night at 50 to 60 lights. The best time is from 7 to 10 p.m. and then again from 2 to 4 a.m. In the rest of the night there are only a few individual stragglers. About 10 years ago, our informant, then a boy, claims to have killed over 200 birds in a night single handed. The birds are plucked of their feathers and either eaten fresh, or smoke-dried and preserved for future consumption.

As regards the species of these birds there seemed to be much uncertainty. Our informant described them as 'Geese, small ducks waterbirds with long legs like storks, and others sparrow size and even smaller'. Unfortunately no diagnostic parts of the birds were available for examination since before drying the head, bill and legs are discarded. The collection of feathers picked up on the site of the slaughters and brought to Bombay for study with the Society's reference collection of birds gave no evidence of any geese or ducks, but some species whose identity is unmistakable were as follows!

Malay Bittern (Gorsakius melanolophus)
 Little White Egret (Egretta garzetta)
 Hill Partridge (Arborophila rufogularis?)
 Kalij Pheasant (Lophura?)
 Green Pigeon (Treron sp.?)
 Emerald Dove (Chalcophaps indica)
 Whitebreasted Kingfisher (Halcyon smyrnensis)
 Ruddy Kingfisher (Antomothera coromanda)
 Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi)
 Necklaced Laughing Thrush (Garrulax moniligerus)

Many other feathers could not be properly identified. The curious thing, however, is that all the species in the above list are what is known as 'resident' birds, though our informant asserted that they are not met with in that part of the country at any other time excepting only 'green pigeons' of which considerable numbers appear to be attracted to the lights at this period. The identification of Emerald Dove feathers was confirmed by two live

examples kept in a cage, taken at a light a few weeks previously.
'non-migratory'

This seasonal nocturnal mass movement of birds all of which are diurnal except the bittern and should normally be roosting peacefully, is difficult to understand and worthy of closer investigation by some knowledgeable bird student resident in that neighbourhood. It is hoped that this note will help to focus attention on the 'mystery'. I understand that this cruel practice of wholesale destruction of birds at lights is prohibited by law; but that it continues nevertheless, and without anybody apparently being much concerned about the ban, is all too evident. Here again there is a fruitful venue for ringing birds on the appropriate occasions by persons resident on or within easy reach of the spot. Owing to distance and the uncertainty of the occurrence of the requisite weather conditions it would obviously be impracticable for the Bombay Natural History Society to undertake the work departmentally.

Sálim Ali

REVIEW

A BIRD PHOTOGRAPHER IN INDIA. By E.H.N. Lowther. 150 pages with 87 black-and-white plates. Published by the Oxford University Press. Price Rs10.

Those of you who are familiar with the bird literature of India know what an outstanding bird book this is. It was originally published in 1949 and has now been produced as a paper back edition by the Oxford University Press. This is a publication which all readers of the Newsletter must possess. It is seldom that a book of this quality can be had for so small a price.

In one of his talks to research workers David Lack said that it was essential to love the bird on which research was being done if any worth while results were to follow. One has only to open this book to realise how deeply attached the author was to the birds he photographed and about which he has written. One of his first loves was the Crested Swift. "As I gazed at the bird seated on her tiny nest only 12 feet up from the ground, I feared I should burst with happiness. I felt I had reached the topmost rung of my ornithological ladder, and that having photographed the bird at home, I could retire gracefully from camera-nesting operations in India. So bold was she that I was able to stand within seven feet of her; she made, too, such a beautiful picture that I determined there and then that if ever I wrote a book about Indian birds, her photograph should form the frontispiece to the work." The photograph of the Crested Swift which adorns this book is one of the most charming bird pictures which one can see.

This book deals with the birds which the author has seen in the gardens of all the bungalows which he occupied, with the birds of the forest areas of Bihar, with those around tanks and jheels, with the birds of the river beds, and with eagles and birds of prey which can be seen overhead everywhere in this country. Being a competent ornithologist his comments are of scientific value to naturalists, and being such a devoted bird watcher and photographer, his book will be equally valuable to the amateur, in arousing his interest and introducing to him the methods of useful observation.

E.H.N. Lowther spent 47 years in India in the service of the railways. He is reported to have said humourously that he worked in his spare time, for bird photography kept him busy during office hours. His main beats were in the United Provinces of old, and in Agra, Ettawah, and Ranchi. In the days when sahibs were apt to be a little rough with natives, Lowther was the exception. He belonged to that generous category of people who went far out of their way to redress a wrong, and established the most cordial atmosphere with his subordinate staff. His book is affectionately dedicated to 'the memory of Pokhi Ahir of Banno village and to Sakroo Mahato village chowkidar of Topchanchi police station who served me loyally and devotedly as bird shikaris for many years"

This book is available from the publishers and from book stalls everywhere in India.

Zafar Futehally

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The past thirteen issues of the Newsletter have confirmed that though bird watchers in this country are few and far between, some of these at least, are prepared to take a great deal of trouble to keep it going. Now that a high powered Editorial Board has been formed its future is less precarious than it used to be last year.

One rather pathetic complaint made at the meeting, minutes of which are given earlier in this paper, was that the novice who wants to make a beginning with bird watching, cannot do so unless an expert is on hand to guide and inform. Dr. Salim Ali dealt with this by stating that with the aid of a note book, pencil, a pair of binoculars, a handbook of Indian birds, and a little trouble, it is possible to track down most of the common birds. The binoculars is the only expensive part of the outfit. If any of our readers have suggestions to make about sources of supply, they would be most welcome. If anyone has an old pair for sale, this Newsletter may help to bring buyer and seller together.

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During the past year when this Newsletter was sent out free to interested persons, the attitude of recipients was, perhaps, not to look a gift horse in the mouth. Now that a subscription has been decided upon, more critical comments are invited in the hope that the product can live up to what is expected of it.

CORRESPONDENCE

Now that the breeding season of the Pariah Kite (Milvus migrans govinda) has started, one could see the birds in pairs busy preparing their nests. The breeding season of these birds runs roughly from September to April, varying locally.

I am observing a nest on a palmyra palm in Chembur, near my house, for the last one month (September 1961). As the nest is placed in between the stalks of two leaves all the activities of the birds are not visible for a proper study. Yet certain movements of the birds could be observed from below.

The nest is built up of dry twigs. It seems to be a flat, plat-

form-like structure. While constructing the nest it was seen that one bird continuously supplies the twigs, while the other sets them right. As the sexes are alike it is not possible to make out the male and the female. I have noticed them mating twice even after constructing the nest. Both the birds are seen to share the responsibility of brooding the eggs.

It is to be seen whether the same pair will choose the same spot for nesting in the next season also.

Lack of facilities curb me from doing more observations and I always look forward for suggestions from you for further observations.

R.S. Prasad, Bombay

* * * *

May I express my sincere thanks for putting me on your mailing list. I do not know to whom I owe this favour, but it may be due to the kindness of Capt. Nadir Tyabji of the Indian Navy.

I would also be grateful if you would kindly let me know where I could get Peter Scott's WILDFOWL OF THE WORLD reviewed in your Newsletter No. 13.

Commander R.L. Pereira, I.N.

* * * *

Curiously enough the Newsletter No. 13 posted at 12.30 noon on 29.xi.61 seems to have reached Chittur (Kerala) on 13.xii.61 and it reached me on the 14th!

It is a great pity that in your review of Peter Scott's KEY TO WILDFOWL OF THE WORLD you have not mentioned the price. Is the book available in India; if so from which bookseller. Kindly include this information in the next Newsletter.

K.K. Neelakantan

KEY TO WILDFOWL OF THE WORLD, by Peter Scott, can be ordered from Strand Book Shop, Dhan Nur, Sir Pherozshah Mehta Road, Fort, Bombay 1. - Ed.

* * * *

While reading your article on 'Bird Watching in Kihim', I remembered my own holidays during Diwali at Tarapore-Chinchani, which is about 58 miles from Bombay on the Western Railway, coastline. I did see quite a good number of birds on the beach and the fields. I wish I had somebody with me to help me in identifying them. I am sure with the help of outings conducted by our proposed Society amateur bird lovers like me will benefit a lot.

B.A. Palkhiwalla

* * * *

We are taught some fundamentals of wild life in our college (Indian Forest College) but nothing about migration and feeding habits. Hence I request you to kindly give me some tips on this subject.

U.T. Alva, B.Sc. (Agri.) Hons.
Mysore.

* * * *

Rosy Pastors in South India.

During my recent trip to South India, in the first week of December, I observed a flock of birds looking very much like the Rosy Pastors. I observed them while travelling in a bus on the Tindivanam-Pondicherry route, in the jowar fields. I, of course, could not confirm these as I was in a moving bus. But on December 12th, I shot an adult Rosy Pastor near Sagar (Mysore State). This was alone and although I am trying to locate more of these, I have not been able to see any more. In Sagar, the Rosy Pastor was in hundreds during last February and March.

How domesticated are the Whiteheaded Babblers? In many places in Tamilnad, I found them in large numbers of flocks of 6-7, in villages and bus-stands. At Kancheepuram, these babblers appeared to be so tame that they were visiting the kitchen of houses and in bus-stands. I also saw them moving about with their whistling noise on many babool trees on the roadside. They were so abundant in this area to attract notice.

Regarding the proposed Ornithological Society, or the Bird Watchers' Club, I think it should be very broadbased to invite many amateurs. The object should be more directed to stimulate interest on bird watching and bird life among the public. As soon as the rules are framed for the proposed society, please send me about a dozen forms of membership as there are many local people here who would like to enrol themselves as members.

P.K. Rajagopalan,
Virus Research Centre Field Station,
Sagar, Shimoga Dist.

Zafar Futehally,
Editor, Newsletter for Bird Watchers,
Juhu Lane,
Andheri, Bombay 58.

NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRD WATCHERS

Vol. 2, No. 2

February 1962

BIRDS IN THE LAND OF "Mr. B.A.":

AN ACCOUNT OF A TRIP TO A CREEK IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Not often does it fall to the lot of a stay-at-home, small-time bird-watcher to go 'exploring' and to come across a piece of superb, but obscure, bird country. Therefore, I consider it a rare stroke of luck which took me to the south-east corner of the Krishna District in Andhra Pradesh during Christmas week, 1960. For two days I was able to wander about in a remote area full of a large variety and number of birds. The place is so primitive and so sparsely inhabited that the only man who has been to College is universally known as 'B.A. Garu' - which may be translated as 'Mr. B.A.' People who knew him quite well, for he is the First Citizen of the place and its only politician, were unable to recall his real name! The only means of transport to this locality, from where I was, was the motor launch, though, when we reached there, we found that it boasts of a motor 'van' which could put to shame the Pelican's pouch for capaciousness, and the latest type of Army jeep for mobility.

I had gone to Andhra Pradesh in order to gather details about a pelicanry (see Journal of Bombay Natural Hist. Soc. Vol. 48, pp. 656-666, and Vol. 57, pp. 245-251). Finding that the more I learned about the movements of the pelicans, the more difficult it became to locate the waters from which they obtained food, I got down 1 inch Survey maps of the whole area to help me locate large bodies of water. The map suggested that the pelicans could be resorting to an extensive back-water called the Guyyuru Creek. So I decided to go there and investigate.

The launch took us in three hours from Bhimavaram town to the village of Lakshmipuram, our camp. On the way I got my first good look at the Longbilled Vulture and was able to compare it with the Whitebacked species as some of these were feeding side by side on the bund. At a number of places large flocks of Openbill Storks sailed across the sky. Terns and swallows were everywhere.

We reached Lakshmipuram at noon. It took more than an hour to get the Travellers' Bungalow opened, but that was one occasion when I did not resent such dilatoriness. The trees and bushes around the T.B. were full of birds, as were the patches of grass and reeds all around. Never had I seen such activity among birds at noon, and I felt justified in thinking that they had all assembled there to greet me!

I had been left alone and had to keep an eye on our luggage. I sat on a heap of it in regal comfort and observed the various birds that were before me: Indian Rollers, Pond Herons, White-breasted Kingfishers, Roseringed Parakeets, Black Drongos, House

Crows, Redvented Bulbuls, Green Bee-eaters, Spotted Doves, Common Mynas, Spotted Munias, Yellowthroated Sparrows, a Brown Shrike, a Kestrel, Pipits, and Yellow Wagtails.

As I was taking stock of these, there was a flash of glistening purple, and a kingfisher alighted in a fig tree near the canal. My immediate reaction was to curse my companion roundly -- in absentia, of course -- for he had left me alone, and a troop of Blackfaced langurs on near-by trees made it impossible for me to move even a yard from our luggage. But later I felt profoundly grateful to man and monkey for having pinned me down to one spot. If I had yielded to temptation and run towards the kingfisher, it would certainly have flown away. As it was I could gaze at the purple-clad vision for a few minutes and take in the black cap, white chin and collar, black epaulette, chestnut underparts, dark red bill and coral legs. It was a 'new' bird to add to my list -- the rare Blackcapped Kingfisher. Unfortunately I could not hear its voice though I saw it again for a few minutes the next day also.

A week later, on going through my books, I was surprised to find that 55 years ago, on the 16th of January, 1905, Roscoe Allen had seen a Blackcapped Kingfisher 'near the Lutchmipuram Lock on the Upputeru River' -- perhaps at the very same spot where I had seen one, for the T.B. was only a few yards away from the lock, and Allen, too, could only have stayed at this T.B.

Within a few minutes appeared my next 'new' bird. Sweet, Pied Myna-like calls drew my attention to a party of 18-20 mynas feeding in a luxuriant lantana thicket. Soon I had a few rough sketches and a page or two of notes giving every detail from colour of eye and eye-rim to feeding habits. It was only days later that I learnt their identity: beautiful, but rather babbler-like in behaviour, these had been Greyheaded Mynas. It was surprising to me to find so many varieties of mynas at one place: Common, Jungle, Pied, Blackheaded and Greyheaded, all within a couple of square miles!

By the time I had noted all I could about the Greyheaded Mynas, other birds had also arrived: Spotted Doves, A Blackheaded Myna, a Whitebreasted Waterhen, some Jungle Crows, Palm Swifts and Common Swallows. There was an elusive Warbler in the bushes continually uttering a tcheck call. From the tips of casuarina branches dangled many Baya Sparrow nests, but the birds were absent.

A single lark was singing high up under the supervision of a few Whitebacked Vultures. Soon there appeared other birds in the sky: the first of these were 3 White Ibises. Next came 4 large, long-legged water birds, with long, slender, out-stretched necks, which sailed slowly to the SE. They seemed all-black from below, and much larger than the 2 Openbills which followed them. A wedge of teal flew over a little later, and a huge swarm of plovers rose, wheeled and sank over the shimmering marshes south of the T.B.

At 1.15 p.m. appeared the first pelican of the day. By that time the T.B. had been opened, and the local Chief of Protocol, Mr. B. A., had also arrived.....

With Mr. B.A. for guide we began our round of the place at 3 p.m. The first thing to catch my eye was a flock of 40 pelicans overhead, slowly drifting north. Soon we reached an expanse of marshy land which had attracted a large number of terns (mostly Gull-billed, with a few Caspians), egrets of 4 kinds, a few Grey

Hérons, flocks of Openbills, Blackwinged Stilts, Pheasant-tailed Jacanas in non-breeding plumage and rafts of teal. Pairs of Ruddy Shelduck, some Brahminy Kites, Marsh Harriers and female harriers flew about or sat here and there. Nearer the bunds were Bluetailed and Green Bee-eaters, Black Drongos, the two Crows and, not far away, in a tree were 2 Ring Doves.

Over the Guyyaru Creek and the adjacent marshy land, huge clouds of teal and smaller wisps of plovers were seen constantly on the move. Each flock looked like the smoke from a train travelling at speed. But the number of flocks was so large that one had to imagine many fast expresses running smok. The fusillades of 4 professional hunters armed with muzzle-loaders were responsible for much of this excitement among the teals.....

On returning to the T.B. at dusk, I found a Kestrel sitting in a casuarina. As though it had been waiting for me, the bird flew down and then shot up to alight on the beam under the eaves. When I looked at it at 7.15 p.m. it was sitting in a niche formed by the beam against the wall, its back and tail touching the tiles. It stared at the torch, but did not fly away. Next morning a reddish brown pellet and large splotches of white excrement were seen under the perch. During the night Spotted Owlets called often. I heard also an unidentifiable, asthmatic wheezing constantly repeated. Could it have been the Kestrel snoring??

The next day was our 'field day', but I shall spare you details of all we did and saw. I must mention, however, that I saw 2 flocks of Flamingo quietly feeding in the shallow waters of the creek. There were six to seven hundred of them. Unfortunately, the local people seem to consider Flamingo flesh a rare delicacy!

In the swampy fields and creek margins were seen (in addition to some of the birds mentioned earlier): a few Painted Storks, Redwattled Lapwings, gulls, Little Cormorants, Booted Eagles and 2 Curlews. To the general list, the day's outing added the following: Jungle Myna, Pied Myna, Willow Warbler, Indian Tree Pie, Koel, Indian Oriole, Common Kingfisher (just one!), Crow-Pheasant, Coot, and Greenshank.

As my pre-occupation at the time was with the pelican, I could not observe the various plovers, ducks, and some of the smaller birds well enough to attempt identification. I only hope that by the time I am ready for a second visit to this bonanza, the place would not have become so civilized (Block Development and other activities were very much in evidence!) as to be unapproachable to birds and bird-watchers alike!

X.K. Neelakantan,
Chittur, Kerala State.

END OF A MARTIN

I have a small roost of nine Crag Martins -- the migratory species -- on a ledge outside the window of the room where I am working, which could be all caught by a butterfly net. The tenth bird was snapped up by a raptor right from under my nose in the literal sense, as the birds were hawking in a stiff breeze outside the window from which I was hanging out to get a better view of the birds along the ledge, and they were flying within a couple of feet from my face, when there was a flash of wings, a subdued krr krr krr of the victim, and the hunter was sailing down with an unfortunate Martin in its feet.

So quick was the manouever that I was left in a doubt whether the bird was a Shikra or a Hobby (I suspect the former), and the rest of the Martins never quite knew of the tragedy among them. By the way all this happened during dusk.

The Crag Martins are distinguished from the resident Dusky Crag Martin by the paler upper plumage which contrasts strongly with the dark brown of the wings. The breast is a decidedly pale vinous brown. Of course the bird is also larger in size; the flight is less erratic. From above this bird can be mistaken for a Sand Martin, but from below there is no mistaking, as the Sand Martin is white below, with an interrupted brown band across the chest. The habitats are generally separate.

K. S. Lavkumar,
The Palace, Jasdan

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST'

I have been watching from 9th December 1961 a pair of Grey Babblers on an Acacia tree which is surrounded by three jambu trees. The Acacia is in an open field near groundnut and jowari cultivation. The birds visited the tree every evening at twilight. They came at about 5.30 p.m., and the male was the first to arrive and was followed by the female in the same direction.

The male sitting on the branch called kay, kay, kay at long intervals. When the female arrived she also called in the same fashion. Then there was silence for 15 minutes. The female was the first to break the silence by calling in the same way. After this the pair started a chorus. During this performance though the call was of the same type the interval was comparatively shorter, and was at a higher pitch. This was repeated again and again with a frequency of 5 to 7 minutes. This went on till 7 p.m. after which the birds were silent. I watched this behaviour every day till the 15th December.

On the morning of the 16th at about 9 o'clock the male brought a twig held in its legs and placed it on a tri-forked branch of the tree where they used to sit every evening. After a few minutes the female came carrying a twig the same way. After placing the twig in a cross manner the pair left the tree. Then after an interval of about half an hour they came back with twigs. The same type of job was repeated, sometimes the twigs were brought in their legs and sometimes in their beaks. When brought the twigs were held horizontal to the body. The male was making more trips and the female was keen in placing the twigs in an orderly manner. Thus the platform was raised on the 18th. On that evening when she returned at twilight she sat on the half completed nest. The male had arrived at the nest almost half an hour before his mate. When the female came he fluttered his wings raised the tail, and jumped from one branch to another. Sometimes he had encounters with Jungle Crows that kept returning to the tree after their evening bath in the nearby Vellna river. The nest, a deep conical shaped cup of twigs was completed on 21st December, and was about 18 feet from the ground.

From the next day the birds started bringing soft grasses and fine rootlets. The materials were kept inside the nest to form a smooth and soft inner wall. As before the female worked on the nest while the male brought the material. This went on till the 22nd. When the nest was completed the male took shelter with his partner in the nest. But he entered the nest always after her arrival.

Till the 23rd evening the same type of routine was going on. On the 24th morning at about 8.30 a.m. three small blue eggs* (about the size of a Bathian-nut) were placed more or less in the centre. The pair that day onwards was not found to go long distances. They were often seen around an area of 200 to 300 yards from the nest, and frequently came back to the nest.

On the 24th evening when I climbed the adjacent tree from where I used to observe the birds, to my surprise I could only see 2 eggs and I could not ascertain what happened to the third. When I went to the same spot on the 25th at about 11 a.m. to my disappointment I saw the nest dismantled and some of the twigs on the ground. There were no eggs. On looking around I saw a Jungle Crow cleaning its beak. I felt sorry for the birds whose hard labour had been ruined in a few minutes. I hope that another will provide me an opportunity to trace the facts further about the incubating habits and parental care of these birds.

K. Janakiraman
Kelghar

/[*It is not clear whether egg-laying commenced when the nest was in the process of being lined. Will the author please clarify? - Eds.]

FURTHER NOTES ON THE BIRDS OF NAJAFGARH AREA

15 October 1961: Wagtails. Owing to abnormal rains during Aug./September a large portion of the low-lying areas surrounding the Jheel was still under water and the fields damp and slushy. Over-all the area provided ideal conditions for the family Motacillidae of which three species, Motacilla flava, alba, and citreola were seen in large numbers spread over the whole area.

Indian Pipit: Also seen on this date feeding on or near large dung heaps.

15 November 1961: Though there was no recession of the jheel margins the surrounding countryside was somewhat drier than on 15th October. Even so, the number of Motacilla flava, alba, and citreola was about the same as on the previous date. Unfortunately, no record is available of even the approximate date of first arrival but these birds had either lingered on their passage south due to ideal feeding conditions or were late arrivals.

No sign of the Indian Pipit.

Starlings: A small flock of about 8 birds was seen -- the first observed this year.

Little Ringed Plover: Four birds were seen singly in the shallow margins of the jheel -- first observed this year.

On 15th October a party of about 3 individuals of the Indian Courser was seen on the wing, and later feeding in dry fallow land.

Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.

WATCHING BIRDS AT A NIGHT ROOST

On Saturday morning, 6 January 1962, at about 6.30 a.m. I was watching swallows and other birds rise from their night roost in front of my house in Bandra East. A patch of mangrove vegetation that still remains to be reclaimed was being used as roost for some days by birds.

While watching them I noticed a batch of 14 Pied Mynas fly into the patch of mangrove, and settle on the branches. Hardly had they done so, they were swooped upon by a crow, which forced the birds to abandon the mangrove patch and settle on the terrace of a nearby building under construction. The crow resumed its swoop on the mynas on the terrace, but the mynas refused to yield ground, and joined together in mobbing the crow off.

A batch of 14 birds may be an interesting addition to the list of Bombay birds. The colour illustration on the jacket and in the text of THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS helped in pin-pointing their identity, though it was my first encounter with this bird.

Another interesting bird within the city of Bombay is the Blue-throat which I saw sitting on a stone by the edge of the above swamp. Its identity was again done with the help of the illustration in Dr. Salim Ali's book.

K.R.S. Shetty

THE STARLING (STURNUS VULGARIS LINN.) IN BOMBAY

On the evening of 13 January at about 5 p.m. I visited a mangrove swamp in Bandra East to watch the migrant birds feeding in it. My attention was attracted to mobbing calls similar to the ones of the Common Mynas in a scrap. Reaching the edge of the swamp I found that they came from birds jet black in colour, six of them all together -- four on the branches of Avicinia and two on the ground at the foot of the plant. They were being mobbed by a large flock of house sparrows, against whom they were noisily remonstrating. Binoculars were trained on the birds (they were hardly a 20 yards from the edge of the swamp where I stood). This revealed their plumage to be dotted, the shape of the bird and the pattern of the dots recalling the coloured illustrations of the Starling in literature, thus helping their identification.

The commotion went on for about 20 minutes before the Starlings left the swamp followed by the sparrows, and settled on the terrace of a building at the edge of the swamp, and then flew off in a northerly direction. The condition of their plumage coupled with the fact that six were together rules out the possibility that they were cage escapes.

Dr. S. Dillon Ripley in his A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN includes northern Gujarat and M.P. in the winter itinerary of the race poltaratskyi Finsch of the Starling, and adds "two records for Madras". The bird has never been recorded from the neighbourhood of Bombay.

I have also had occasions to observe hostility of House Spar-

rows to Rosy Pastor flocks, and wonder whether they are generally hostile to the family Sturnidae both resident and migratory or whether it is just a resentment of intruders in flocks encroaching their feeding or roosting grounds irrespective of any discrimination.

J.S. Serrao

BIRDS OF NEW DELHI AREA

I list the following birds as they have not been commonly noticed in other localities in the Delhi area by me.

GREY TIT: Two pairs have been observed in the New Delhi area during 1961, none having been seen in 1960. The first pair was sighted on 25 September and the second on 7 November in well-separated localities but in similar habitat.

COMMON SANDPIPER: Seen singly in the Lodi Gardens between 7th and 12th November.

YELLOWFRONTED PIED WOODFECKER: Single bird seen on 12 November in Lodi Gardens.

REDHEADED MERLIN: Single bird seen perched on babool and on the ground on 7 November in Lodi Gardens.

RUFOSBELLIED BABBLER: About a dozen birds seen singly and in small parties of 2 and 3 in the shrubbery in Lodi Gardens on 12 November.

COMMON WOOD SHRIKE: A party of about 12 birds seen in neem tree in Lodi Gardens on 7 November.

Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.

REVIEWS

BIRDS: A Guide to the most Familiar American Birds. By Herbert S. Zim, Ph.D., and Ira N. Gabrielson. Illustrated by James Gordon Irving. pp. 160. Golden Press, New York, 1956. Price \$1.

A POCKET GUIDE TO BIRDS. By Allan D. Cruickshank. Photographs by Helen G. Cruickshank, drawings by Don Eckelberry. Washington Square Press, 1953. pp. 213. Price 50¢.

Both these paperbacks are meant to guide the young American bird watchers, both are meant to help in the identification of birds and both have been designed to be carried about in the pocket.

The first book by Herbert S. Zim is the more luscious publication, containing 125 pictures of the more familiar birds in full colour. These birds have been used as keys in order to describe additional and related species - so that it is hoped that by using this book properly, the reader would be able to identify at least 250 species all together. Each bird plate

carries in a corner a small map in which the summer distribution of that species is marked in pink and the winter distribution in blue.

Indian bird watchers would not expect to find this book very useful for identification, but there is a great deal of information of a general nature which should be of interest to amateurs. Among other things there are notes on how to attract birds to the vicinity of the house. Careful instructions on banding -- apart from notes and diagrams on bird classification and general biology. Certainly at this price, the beautiful plates themselves make the book worth buying.

The author of the second book is the official lecturer of the National Audubon Society, and has spent several years in teaching beginners to identify birds. The long general chapter on identification with its emphasis on family characteristics is likely to give a great deal of valuable help to all beginners whether American or Indian. Another thing that American students are likely to find very useful is the pages of outline drawings of birds grouped under different headings, such as 'Birds usually found on or near water', 'Birds frequently seen on the ground', and 'Birds usually seen in trees or bushes'. The species described are arranged in families in the standard sequence now used by American ornithologists. Many of the species are illustrated in excellent black and white drawings, while there are 25 pages of coloured photographs.

L.F.

The two books reviewed here can be had through Messrs Strand Book Stall, Dhannur, Sir Pheroze Shah Mehta Road, Fort, Bombay 1.
-- Eds. 7

NOTES AND COMMENTS

A report was received from a friend of mine in Delhi that during the recent cold spell a number of birds were found frozen to death in the mornings. Apparently sunbirds and common green bee-eaters seemed to be unable to stand the cold. It would be interesting to get reports of such deaths from various parts of the country. Readers are requested to send in their notes.

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The notes received for publication in the Newsletter so far can broadly be divided into two categories. Those received from ornithologists have of course been well worth publishing in the form received. But many received from amateur bird watchers have had to be radically edited. This of course should not discourage amateurs, and I hope that contributors have no objection to the use of the editorial knife. They are seriously advised to re-read the note on Field Identification of Birds by H.G. Alexander, which was reproduced in our first issue, and also the note on Bird Watching in India in the April 1961 issue of the Newsletter. Those of you who can subscribe to the quarterly journal Bird Study published by the British Trust for Ornithology will find it a very rewarding investment. The article by Dr. David Lack entitled Hints on Research for Bird-Watchers in Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1960, pp. 9-20 is an admirable exposition, and is strongly recommended for every one who watches birds whether for pleasure or as a scientific pursuit. Another article entitled Back Garden Ornithology, by the Rev. P.H.T. Hartley, in Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1954, pp. 18-27 in the same

journal, running down incompetent and careless bird watching should be a stimulant to all of us to take our hobby more seriously.

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In Notes and Comments section in Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 1962) a query was raised in regard to availability of binoculars in the country. Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N., a member of our Editorial Board, who had been in correspondence with the Director General of Ordnance Factories, Govt. of India, Ministry of Defence, informs that the following binoculars manufactured by the Ordnance Factory are available ex stock:

Prismatic Binoculars 8 x 30: Magnification: 8x; Objective dia.: 30 mm.; Field of view $6\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}$ (109 yards at 1000 yds). All optics are coated to increase brightness and contrast the image. Ideally combine requirements of magnification, field of view, and image brightness. Universal prism; suitable for sports, travel, rambling, and touring. Price Rs250.00 each.

Prismatic Binoculars 10 x 50: Magnification: 10x; Objective dia.: 50 mm.; Field of view: 5° (87 yards at 1000 yards). All optics coated to increase brightness and contrast of image. High power wide field bins of high light transmitting power, ideally suitable for shooting, marine use, and aviation. Price Rs475.00 each.

The following can be supplied on demand:

6 x 30: Magnification: 6x; Objective dia.: 30 mm.; Field of view: $8\frac{1}{4}^{\circ}$ (144 yards at 1000 yds). Price Rs200.00 each.

7 x 50: Magnification: 7x; Objective dia.: 50 mm.; Field of view: 7° (122 yards at 1000 yds). Price Rs425.00 each.

Prices include velvet-lined leather case with neck sling.

These binoculars can be had from the following selling agents of the manufacturers:

1. Messrs Precision Scientific Equipment Corpn.,
9A/36, W.E.A. Karol Bagh, New Delhi 5
2. Messrs Free India Scientific Co.,
74-A, Kothavalchavadi Street, Saidapet, Madras 5
3. Messrs Raj-Der-Kar & Co.,
Sadhana Rayon House, Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji Road,
Fort, Bombay 1
4. Messrs Adair Dutt & Co. (India) Private Ltd.,
5, Dalhousie Square East, Calcutta 1
5. Messrs Jame Murray & Co. (Private) Ltd.,
5, Old Court House Street, Calcutta 1
6. Messrs The Scientific Instrument Co. Ltd.,
6, Tej Bahadur Sapru Road, Allahabad.

CORRESPONDENCE

I read the Minutes of the Meeting of 16th December 1961 with interest. Since Dr. Salim Ali had specially asked me to come and express my views, and since my name has been mentioned in the presence list, I feel that my strong sentiment favouring the new Society being run as a wing of the Bombay Natural History Society might have been recorded.

The impression now created amongst readers who were not present at the meeting, that I either favour or am indifferent to a new Ornithological Society being created in dissociation with the Bombay Natural History Society makes my position rather uncomfortable. I wish the misapprehension might somehow be cleared. Forgive the criticism. Writing minutes is a ticklish job.

D.J. Panday

The Editor owes an apology to Mr. Panday for not referring to his views in the minutes of the meeting of 16th December. The proposal to form a Bird Wing of the Bombay Natural History Society composed of subscribers to the Newsletter had already been discussed with the Executive Committee of the Bombay Natural History Society. Although the Society preferred to have a Bird Wing rather than encourage the creation of a new Ornithological Society they could not, in view of their existing commitments, offer us either substantial practical help or any special amenities. In the event it was decided, as I wrote in the minutes, to postpone any decision on this matter for another year. -- Ed. 7

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I was particularly pleased with the article on the Pheasant-tailed Jacana's breeding habits in the January 1962 issue. I am glad to learn that Dr. Salim Ali took photographs. I do hope that after a further period of observation during the next breeding season, an illustrated monograph on the breeding habits of the Jacana could be published.

Detailed study of individual birds is sadly lacking in India. It is a pity that we hardly know anything about the life history of the majority of common Indian birds. A vast field is open for the keen young ornithologists of future India.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

* * *

The following have accepted the membership of our Editorial Board

1. Dr. Salim Ali, 33 Pali Hill, Bandra, Bombay 50
2. Dr. Biswamoy Biswas, Zoological Survey of India, Indian Museum, Calcutta 13
3. Mrs. Jamal Ara, 4 European Bachelors' Qrs., Doranda, Hinoo P.O., Ranchi, Bihar
4. K.S. Lavkumar, Rajkumar College, Rajkot
5. Capt. N.S. Tyabji, Naval Headquarters, New Delhi
6. Mrs. Usha Ganguli, 10 Cavalry Lines, Delhi 6
7. Yuvraj Shivraj Kumar, The Palace, Jasdan, Saurashtra
8. Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, Govt. College, Chittur, Kerala
9. Mr. E.D. Avari, Bengal Natural Hist. Society, Darjeeling

Zafar Futehally

Editor, Newsletter for Bird Watchers
Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58.

SUBSCRIPTION

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CORRESPONDENCE

I read the Minutes of the Meeting of 16th December 1961 with interest. Since Dr. Salim Ali had specially asked me to come and express my views, and since my name has been mentioned in the presence list, I feel that my strong sentiment favouring the new Society being run as a wing of the Bombay Natural History Society might have been recorded.

The impression now created amongst readers who were not present at the meeting, that I either favour or am indifferent to a new Ornithological Society being created in dissociation with the Bombay Natural History Society makes my position rather uncomfortable. I wish the misapprehension might somehow be cleared. Forgive the criticism. Writing minutes is a ticklish job.

D.J. Panday

The Editor owes an apology to Mr. Panday for not referring to his views in the minutes of the meeting of 16th December. The proposal to form a Bird Wing of the Bombay Natural History Society composed of subscribers to the Newsletter had already been discussed with the Executive Committee of the Bombay Natural History Society. Although the Society preferred to have a Bird Wing rather than encourage the creation of a new Ornithological Society they could not, in view of their existing commitments, offer us either substantial practical help or any special amenities. In the event it was decided, as I wrote in the minutes, to postpone any decision on this matter for another year. -- Ed. 7

I was particularly pleased with the article on the Pheasant-tailed Jacana's breeding habits in the January 1962 issue. I am glad to learn that Dr. Salim Ali took photographs. I do hope that after a further period of observation during the next breeding season, an illustrated monograph on the breeding habits of the Jacana could be published.

Detailed study of individual birds is sadly lacking in India. It is a pity that we hardly know anything about the life history of the majority of common Indian birds. A vast field is open for the keen young ornithologists of future India.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

The following have accepted the membership of our Editorial Board

1. Dr. Salim Ali, 33 Pali Hill, Bandra, Bombay 50
2. Dr. Biswamoy Biswas, Zoological Survey of India, Indian Museum, Calcutta 13
3. Mrs. Jamal Ara, 4 European School Road, Qrs., Boranda, Hinoo P.O., Ranchi, Bihar
4. K.S. Lavkumar, Rajkumar College, Rajkot
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THE BNHS/WHO BIRD MIGRATION FIELD PROJECT

Report of activities for the period 15 December 1961
to 15 April 1962

By

Salim Ali

In December 1961, soon after I returned from the exploratory trip in northeastern India intimation was received from Shri P.V. George of Kerala - one of the Baroda University Zoology post-graduates who had assisted in the field camps in Saurashtra and Rajasthan earlier - of the discovery of some large roosts of Yellow Wagtails (Motacilla flava) at Edanad near Chengannur (c. 60 miles S. of Cochin, $9^{\circ} 20' N.$ x $76^{\circ} 38' E.$) in standing fields of sugarcane. The story of how the roosts were located after a fortnight's trailing of the birds, evening after evening, has been related elsewhere (J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc., in press). On learning of the possibility of netting these migrants in large numbers in their winter quarters, the Bombay Natural History Society promptly sent off two of its experienced field assistants to assist Mr. George who meanwhile had also managed to recruit some local helpers.

Netting was started in the area on 21 December but owing to difficulty in adequate supplies of rings, work was intermittent and had finally to close down on 25 January pending arrival of further rings from Europe. In the 20 days of irregular netting 1897 birds were netted and ringed. Attention was restricted to migrant species; any resident birds that blundered into the nets were merely examined for ectoparasites, and if negative were promptly released. Owing to pressure of time and the labour involved in handling such large catches this was the only practicable course.

I visited Kerala in the latter part of January to inspect the scene of operations, arriving at Edanad via Cochin on the 21st, and returning to Bombay on the 26th. A report on the wagtail roosts of Edanad together with the account of their discovery is published by Mr. George in Newsletter for Birdwatchers for April 1962, and an abridged version of the same by myself in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (in press).

The wagtails spend the day feeding in the dyked paddylands of Kuttanad in Vembanad Lake (near Alleppey) and commute 20 to 25 miles SE. every evening to roost among the sugarcane fields at Edanad in fantastically large numbers. On arrival at the roosting ground they mill around 30 to 100 feet over the cane fields filling the sky from horizon to horizon, looking like a swarm of locusts. Gradually the birds begin to drop into the cane at a steep angle, first singly, then in twos and threes, and then in scores and hundreds. By half an hour after sunset all the birds have settled in, leaving the sky clear again. Soon their soft chittering also dies so that there is nothing to suggest the presence of the enormous numbers hidden within the cane. It shows how easily one could miss even such a large roost unless one chanced to be on the spot during just the crucial half hour or so into which all the activity is packed. A line of nets, a couple of feet higher than the cane tops, was strung along the edge of the fields. After all the birds had settled, and while there was still some daylight left, a couple of men entered the cane field from the opposite side to disturb the birds which then flew out more or less horizontally and straight into the nets. In this way it was possible to make sizeable catches at the same roost

day after day without scaring the birds away.

On replenishment of the stock of rings, work on the Kerala wagtails was resumed. A field camp was set up at Edanad under the leadership of Mr. George. He was assisted by four staff members of the Bombay Natural History Society, four of his zoology students from St. Berchman's College, Changanacherry, and Rev. A. Krebs, a Danish missionary from Madras State.

During the period between 18 March and 6 April, a further 4067 birds were caught and ringed by the Kerala party, all but 4 of which were Yellow Wagtails (M. flava) of at least four subspecies representing populations from more or less the entire Palaearctic Region, west to east. (See list below.)

In the interval, in February 1962, a fortunate circumstance had led to the discovery of a populous roost of the migratory Eastern Swallow (Hirundo rustica gutturalis) almost at our doorstep, so to say, right within the limits of Bombay City. It was situated in a dense patch of mangroves adjoining the dilapidated hovels of squatters along the edge of Mahim Creek at the Bandra (northern) end of the Causeway.

Several thousand swallows concentrated to roost in this mangrove patch, not more than a couple of acres in extent, from their widespread foraging around the City. During three evenings 497 swallows were ringed. In spite of its severely urban setting, the pestering curiosity of the crowding neighbours, and the noise and bustle of motor traffic on the adjoining highway, that such useful ringing could be done was due largely to the kindness of the occupants of an adjacent garage and electrical showroom who provided not only a modicum of privacy but also facilities such as chairs, tables and electric light connections for work after dark. The birds could thus be ringed and examined on the spot and released in the shortest possible time. Since then much public interest has been aroused in bird migration and in the Society's ringing activities by the showing all over the country of a documentary news film of our operations at Mahim made by the Films Division of the Government of India on that occasion.

Work was held up thereafter for want of rings of the appropriate size. There was a gap of 15 days till a further supply was procured, but in the interval the birds were found to have abandoned the roost completely. Whether they had suddenly shifted to some other roost, or already started on their northward emigration is uncertain. However, the discovery of this roost so near Bombay opens up promising possibilities for ringing migratory swallows - and may be also wagtails and other species - throughout their winter sojourn in these parts. These possibilities will be fully explored in the coming season.

The second camp for the spring migration ringing was again conducted in Bharatpur (Rajasthan). Local clues furnished by H.H. The Maharaja led to the discovery of a gigantic communal roost of migratory sparrows - the Eastern Spanish (Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus) and the Turkestan House Sparrow (P. domesticus parkini). The former's breeding range extends from Asia Minor eastward to Transcaucasia, Iran, Russian Turkestan and northern Afghanistan; the latter breeds throughout Hazara, Kashmir and Baltistan, to Ladakh etc. They both visit northwestern India in winter, usually keeping in mixed flocks, but neither my own experience nor the literature had ever suggested such unbelievable hordes within Indian limits. Guesswork estimates are always unsatisfactory, but a million birds for this roost would perhaps be on the cautious side. The area of the roost, situated about 7 miles out of Bharatpur on the Deeg road - perhaps a hundred acres

or somewhat more - shows signs of monsoon inundation and is dotted with, bushes, shrubs, and small (mostly thorny) trees, singly and in mixed clumps, of Zizyphus, Capparis aphylla, Acacia, Prosopis spicigera, Salvadora, etc. The sparrows gather here at sunset from the wide expanse of surrounding wheat fields where they commit their depredations throughout the day. They fly about in dense black clouds, settling from time to time on the ripening wheat crops. When shouted off by the watchmen, the cloud rises only to resettle in a neighbouring field. The slings and yells of the farmers merely serve to keep the birds on the move and prevent concentrated damage in any one area. Before retiring into the roosting bushes at sunset the birds fly about restlessly, perching in thick clusters on leafless bush- and tree-tops, silhouetted against the sky like a crop of dense foliage. Apart from a strategic deployment of the nets in the shrubbery across the line of the birds' approach, much success was experienced by two persons carrying an open net stretched between bamboo poles and raised high against a roosting bush after dark. When disturbed from the opposite side, masses of birds flew out straight into the net, often in such quantities that it became difficult for the netters to support the weight.

During 19 days of netting in the Bharatpur area nearly 3000 birds were caught and ringed. The majority of these consisted of the two sparrows, but included were also about 300 wagtails and 78 Garganey Teals (the latter got from professional fowlers). All the wagtails, chiefly Motacilla flava and M. citreola, were taken at the same feedbed roost in Keoladeo Bird Sanctuary where about 150 had been ringed in May last year. One of the latter (M. citreola No. A-5542, ringed 15.5.1961) was recaptured in the identical spot on 26.3.1962, presumably having been to its homeland and back during the interval.

The grand total of migratory birds ringed at all stations during the period of this report is 8952, broken up as under:

<u>Motacilla alba dukhunensis</u>	...	12
<u>Motacilla flava</u> paena	...	2573
<u>Motacilla flava thunbergi</u>	...	1270
<u>Motacilla flava melanogrisea</u>	...	303
<u>Motacilla flava similima</u>	...	364
<u>Motacilla flava subspecies?</u>	...	1232
<u>Motacilla citreola</u>	...	355
<u>Motacilla indica</u>	...	355
<u>Hirundo rustica rustica</u>	...	9
<u>Hirundo rustica gutturalis</u>	...	501
<u>Passer hispaniolensis</u> tra <u>caspicus</u>	...	1294
<u>Passer domesticus parkini</u>	...	457
<u>Passer domesticus indicus</u>	...	21
<u>Acrocephalus stentoreus</u>	...	13
<u>Erithacus syriacus</u> subspecies?	...	21
<u>Emberiza bruniceps</u>	...	33
<u>Anas querquedula</u>	...	78
Total of other species less than 10 each		61
		<u>8952</u>

Yellow Wagtails in immature and winter plumages are notoriously difficult to distinguish. In the above I feel almost certain that many M. f. similima at least have been misidentified as either M. f. melanogrisea or M. citreola.

Recoveries and Recaptures

Two long-distance recoveries were reported from U.S.S.R. (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc., in press) one of a White Wagtail (Motacilla alba dukhunensis, ringed in Kutch and recovered at

Kirov (in the Moscow region), the other a Bharatpur ringed Yellow Wagtail (M. flava) in Kirghizia (Russian Turkestan). The recovery of one of last year's Yellow Wagtails after an interval of 10 months in the very spot where it was ringed is already reported above. There were three recaptures of Yellow Wagtails in Kerala two to three months after ringing, two of them at a different roost, about 7 miles distant, from where originally caught. A significant gain in weight was noted in all three cases.

Ectoparasites

Disappointingly enough, from all the hundreds of migratory wagtails and swallows examined for ticks in Kerala, Rajasthan, and Bombay during the winter and spring and early summer (December-April) only a single M. f. beema from Bharatpur (No. A-34052) was found positive for ticks. It carried a single nymph of Hyalomma m. isaaci, described as a common Ixodid (hard) tick of dry areas of NW. India, adults of which are commonly met with on cattle in Kutch and Saurashtra. The only other tick collected during the spring migration operations was a nymph of Haemaphysa intermedia* on a Spanish Sparrow, Passer hispaniolensis (No. A-34053) also in Bharatpur. Both of these ticks could have been locally acquired. As against the above it is interesting to note that four of the 330 Yellow Wagtails examined in Bharatpur during the autumn migration (Sept. 1961) carried larva and nymphs of Haemaphysalis m. isaaci. The differential infestation probably has some seasonal significance.

While none of the migratory swallows (Hirundo rustica) taken in Bombay or Bharatpur were infested, it is noteworthy that all the four resident Cliff Swallows (Hirundo fluviicola) examined in Bharatpur (i.e. 100%) carried argasid (soft) tick larvae (3, 7, 9, and 49 specimens each respectively) of what may prove to be an undescribed species or subspecies of the genus Argas.

General Remarks

Netting at communal roosts has justified itself as a fruitful source of bulk ringing of migratory birds, so essential for warranting satisfactory recoveries. In future it is proposed to concentrate more and more on this type of work since, besides being the most potentially productive, it is also the most economical both financially and in terms of physical effort. For the present it is proposed to confine our attention primarily to ringing long-distance migrants. The fullest cooperation has been offered by the central organization of the network of ringing stations in the territories of the USSR. An earnest of this was given by their reporting the recovery of the two wagtails mentioned on page 3.

Great delay, frustration, and loss of opportunities are constantly experienced due to the official procedure involved in the procurement of rings from abroad. Recently many excellent opportunities of ringing large numbers of wagtails and swallows were lost in Kerala, Bombay, and Bharatpur on account of shortage of rings and delays in obtaining fresh supplies. The only technical difficulty in manufacturing the rings locally apparently lies in the somewhat complex and expensive gadgets necessary for numbering the rings serially, and turning them out rapidly and in large quantities. On account of the smallness of our demand local

*Kindly identified by the Virus Research Centre, Poona, who report that presently there is some confusion about the name 'intermedia' which will probably have to be replaced.

NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRD WATCHERS

Vol. 2, No. 3

March 1962

THE GREEN WILLOW WARBLER

The Warbler family (Sylviidae) includes nearly a hundred species within our limits, which with a few exceptions, are plainly coloured and the sexes are alike. Some of them are migrants, whilst others are residents in the plains and the lower ranges of the hills. So many species exist and are so difficult to differentiate that the family drives most field ornithologists to the verge of despair. Nonetheless, proficiency can be acquired by close and patient observation.

Amongst these is the Green Willow Warbler (Phylloscopus trochiloides) which is a common and regular winter visitor to the whole of India, hills and plains alike. It is a small bird, soberly dressed; olive-green above, yellowish white below, with a thin supercilium of the same colour. The whitish wing-bar, though faint, is an excellent field mark.

Throughout the cold weather, every tree or high bush, is alive with the restless fluttering of these birds, who prefer the tree-canopy and rarely descend to the undergrowth. On first arrival, they bring with them a sweet little warbling song, to be replaced by a soft tichip-tichip as it gets colder. But an overcast sky, even in the middle of winter, restores their warble.

As winter gives way to spring, their breasts turn more and more golden, their warbling gets more and more pronounced, until just before summer asserts itself, they fly away to their northern breeding haunts.

They are exceedingly active, ever on the move, and so rapid are their movements that to watch them for any length of time is an art itself. They dart about in short erratic sallies catching insects high up amongst the green foliage. Often flies are taken with deft 'flycatcher' sallies. The wings flick quickly on all movements. The long flights are undulating but, if necessary, they exhibit beautifully controlled flight, even hovering for several seconds, and turning and twisting in the

air. They are sociable, freely associating with yellow-cheeked tits, redbreasted flycatchers, white-eyes and other insectivorous birds.

I have been observing them continuously at Ranchi for the last ten years. Normally they arrive in September and leave in April. The arrival and departure are both at night. One day there will not be a single willow warbler in a grove, the next morning it will be resounding with their warblings. They arrive in a flock which breaks up soon after, leaving three or four in each grove.

The process is repeated in spring. Suddenly many birds will congregate and what a chase and a warbling. By evening songs echo throughout the area. Next morning the grove is silent and forlorn, like a deserted village.

Watching them for such a long time has established a spiritual bond between us. I feel the wind blowing differently and the grove wearing an air of expectancy; and lo! the next morning the flock is there. Again the atmosphere is sad when their departure is imminent, and sure enough, the assembly starts. Somehow I feel that the same sets of birds inhabit my grove year after year, so familiar have they become. They too seem to sense their nearness. At first they were content to visit an Alstonia tree in my courtyard, then they explored some vegetable plants, and now flit about with a calm assurance on the pot plants. A special favourite is a Lawsonia bush, festooned with cobwebs, the insects caught in which provide a veritable feast.

They are very fond of dew on leaves. I once noticed a brace exploring a pink Cassia leaf. Finding the leaf wet with dew, one suddenly crouched down and began to go through the motions of bathing; rubbing its breast along the leaf, flapping the underside of the wings, preening itself all the while. While preening it called tichip-tichip. This went on for five minutes then one of the wings was spread like a Chinese fan and preened. It then flew away.

During their stay here, they retire before sunset, and are on the move after sunrise.

I have kept a record of the dates of arrival and departure, together with the temperatures, which makes interesting reading. An analysis of the observations reveals that the average maximum temperature on the date of arrival is $30 \pm 1.6^{\circ}\text{C}.$, and on the date of departure 38.7 ± 1.5 . In determining the temperature for the date of departure, the data for 1961 has been excluded as being abnormal. Similarly the average mean temper-

atures for the dates of arrival and departure are 26.1 ± 1.4 and 31.7 ± 2.4 respectively. In determining this again the data for 1961 has been excluded as being abnormal, since that year the mean temperatures were only $21.9^{\circ}\text{C}.$, and $26.9^{\circ}\text{C}.$, both abnormal -ly low.

Date of arrival	Temperature $^{\circ}\text{C}.$			Date of departure	Temperature $^{\circ}\text{C}.$		
	Max.	Min.	Mean		Max.	Min.	Mean
12.ix.1952	28.3	22.2	25.3	8.iv.1953	38.9	25.0	32.0
5.ix.1953	31.7	23.9	27.8	15.iv.1954	37.2	22.8	30.0
3.x.1954	29.4	21.1	25.3	10.iv.1955	36.7	19.3	28.0
19.ix.1955	29.4	20.3	24.9	Not observed in 1956			
27.viii.1956	29.4	19.3	24.4	14.iv.1957	37.6	22.6	30.1
9.ix.1957	31.2	21.9	26.6	11.iv.1958	39.3	23.7	31.5
6.ix.1958	32.8	24.3	28.6	15.iv.1959	40.6	31.5	36.0
15.ix.1959	28.1	22.6	26.4	6.v.1960	40.9	27.1	34.0
10.ix.1960	31.5	21.2	25.3	2.iv.1961	35.1	18.8	26.9
21.ix.1961	28.4	15.4	21.9	Still with us			

I also determined the averages of the dates of arrival and departure, by taking August 15 and April 1 as Zero and averaging the variations from these dates. These work out to September 13 ± 10 as the date for arrival and April 15 ± 9 as the date of departure. That is, the maximum expectancy is that the bird will arrive at Ranchi between September 3 and September 23, when the mean temperature will be $26^{\circ}\text{C}.$, and will depart between April 6 to April 24, when the mean temperature will be $31.7^{\circ}\text{C}.$ A reference to the table will show that this is correct.

I cannot explain away the data for 1961, without further observation. The date of arrival is within the expected period, but the temperature is much too low. The date for departure is early and of course, the temperature is much below the average, the mean temperature being very much so. Unfortunately, I have kept no record of the weather that obtained in 1961, and cannot say what precipitated the early departure of the bird.

In this connection, I would like to suggest that if a record is kept of the dates of arrival and departure of this bird and a correlation made with the movement of the $26^{\circ}\text{C}.$ and $32^{\circ}\text{C}.$ Isotherms across India, some extremely useful information about migration is likely to be obtained.

I propose to continue my observations, particularly to verify how far this willow warbler conforms to the pattern of movement revealed by the above averages.

(Mrs.) Jamal Ara

THE WALL-CREEPER VISITS TUGHLAKABAD FORT
NEAR DELHI

On the 7th of January last, out on a picnic to Tughlakabad, as soon as I entered the fort, I saw a small dark bird flying out from the first bastion on the right. It was just a flash of grey and crimson, and then it was gone. I immediately know that it was the rare Wall-Creeper, Tichodroma muraria. We looked for it around, but failed to locate it.

Four days later, we organised a second trip in search of the elusive Wall-Creeper. We looked for it on the same bastion of the fort from which it had emerged earlier. Luckily, almost immediately my companion and I caught sight of a small dark grey bird on the ground at the foot of the first bastion. As soon as it saw us it flew to the wall. Up went my binoculars and wonder of wonders the Wall-Creeper was back again. To watch the ease with which this bird was moving along the vertical surface of the wall was a wonderful experience. It was walking with short jerky steps along the stones and occasionally picking tiny insects with its long, slender, curved bill. As it moved, it slightly flicked its wings showing the crimson patches. In repose too a little crimson was visible at the bend of the wings. One could see the white spots in the wings when it flicked them a little wider. Occasionally it disappeared into a hole in the wall in search of insects.

It was thrilling to watch these operations for nearly ten minutes when it flew away. When the bird was in flight only the white spots against the dark wings were visible from below. Its flight was slow, hesitant and undulating - much like that of a Hoopoe.

The Wall-Creeper, about $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, is a dark ash grey bird with bold crimson patches and white spots on dark rounded wings. The tail is dark with large white spots on the outer feathers. It breeds in central and southern Europe, N. Africa, Afghanistan, Tibet, Turkestan, Mongolia, and the Himalayas. In Europe it breeds from 6000 ft. to snow line, and in the Himalayas from about 11,500 to 16,000 ft. occasionally to 21,000 ft. (Ripley). Its nest is a hole on cliff face lined with moss, wool and feathers, and contains 4 to 6 eggs. The nest is generally inaccessible.

It is a common winter visitor in the Kashmir Valley. Lowther & Bates saw near Gulol Gali in Kashmir at about 14,000 ft. a Wall-Creeper carrying food in its bill to its young one perched in a small shelf of a precipitous cliff. In winter it is occasionally found in the plains of northern India.

Curiously, I had first heard of the Wall-Creeper at Tughlakabad way back in January 1951! I had gone out on my second outing with the newly formed Bird Watching Society to watch Wheatears. It was a large gathering of bird watchers led by Mr. Horace Alexander. Someone mentioned that a wall-creeper had been seen on the Qutab Minar. Several members hastened to the Qutab Minar after the excursion was over, and I wondered wistfully if I would ever see the wall-creeper. Years later I asked Mr. Alexander about the Qutab Wall-Creeper and he told me it was high up that all he saw was a small dark bird!

In late October 1954, I visited Kalagarh forest division in the terai, where at the moment, a man-eating tiger is reported to be at large. We stayed in a dak bungalow in the heart of a deep forest, and very near the Ranganga, which separates this area from the Corbett National Park. A little distance away from the dak bungalow, the river flows through a beautiful gorge. It was here that my cousin (with whom I was staying) found the most suitable spot for Mahaseer fishing.

One morning, while angling he drew my attention to two small birds clinging to the cliffs on the opposite bank. Through binoculars I could see them moving and feeding on the sheer cliff with curious jerky movements and observed the crimson flashes on the dark wings. I realized with a thrill, that they were indeed Wall-Creepers! Later, they came down and alighted on the rocks near the river, and with the same jerky movements, slithered in and out of them in search of insects. I had a still better view of them when they were feeding among the rocks on our side of the river. I watched them for well nigh half an hour after which they crossed over to the other side of the river. As I watched them from above, the brilliance of the crimson patches and white spots shown against the near black wings as the birds slowly and hesitatingly flew away reminded me of giant tropical bejewelled butterflies. And now I have met the Wall-Creeper again, nearer home at Tughlakabad. I think I have been lucky with the elusive Tichodroma muraria.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

A KEY TO THE IDENTIFICATION OF SWALLOWS AND SWIFTS
COMMON TO THE INDIAN REGION

Here is a simple key to the identification of these fascinating little birds, which are so widespread and common throughout India. This key seems to have greatly helped some of my juvenile bird watchers, and has been rather patiently worked out by myself after checking with the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA by E.C. Stuart Baker and noting down the characters in the field. For the very novice bird watcher, I might say that this key is for the identification of birds which obtain their food by flying around in the air tirelessly and snapping up small, microscopic, winged insects very much in the manner of bats. In fact I mention bats, because, rather correctly I thought, my small son asked me whether they were not related to bats which they closely resembled.

K e y

- A. Small bat-like creatures hawking insects after dusk Bats (Mammals)
- B. Small bat-like creatures hawking insects in bright daylight Swifts, Swallows, and Martins (Birds)
- I. Bow-shaped wings, quivering wing-beats, with downward strokes, nests attached to ceilings, of feathers .. Swifts
 - a. Size of sparrows:
 - i. Almost square tails; white chin and throat patch and rump .. Indian House Swift
 - ii. Forked tail. Uniform brown .. Palm Swift
 - iii. Forked tail. White and grey generally .. Crested Tree Swift
 - b. Much larger than sparrows, with fast flight:
 - i. White on lower plumage with brown breast band .. Alpine Swift
 - ii. Uniformly brown plumage .. Eastern Swift (rare)
- II. Triangular wings, distinct backward stroke of wings. Very direct, low flight. Nests attached to ceilings but made of mud pellets Swallows & Martins
 - a. Shining blue above, white below .. Swallows

- i. Forked tails. No rump patch, chest-nut chin and throat .. Common Swallow
- Forked tails. Pale reddish rump patch, throat white and streaked .. Striated Swallow
- ii. Square tails. Glistening blue above, pure white below, long thin wires in good plumage .. Wiretailed Swallow
- Square tails. Upper plumage not glistening, lower plumage dull with streaks (nondescript) .. Cliff Swallow
- b. Brown plumage, no blue .. Martins
- i. Uniformly brown. Dusky brown, back same shade as wings .. Dusky Crag Martin
- Uniformly brown. Paler brown, back lighter than wings .. Crag Martin
- ii. White below with brown chest band Sand Martin

Of course, there is a great difference in the flight of birds and bats, but it is rather difficult to explain this difference in words, and watching bats, swifts, and swallows on the wing for some time, will immediately bring out the characteristics. I always hold that the best way of getting to know the birds is just to watch them first -- their antics, their habitats, and their food. Then noting these down in a scrap book to be carefully checked with a standard bird book. A good idea is to give a bird your own name until it can be possible to replace the personal name with a more widely accepted one but not knowing a common name, should not in anyway take away the pleasure of getting to know the birds of the garden and the countryside.

A point of clarification must be made here, and that is that swifts and swallows are not closely related, it is only that they have developed a mode of life which is similar and as such there is a superficial relationship in appearance between the two groups: swallows are perching birds, while swifts are not.

K.S. Lavkumar

HINTS FOR BEGINNERS

When you come across an unfamiliar bird you must jot down on the spot (dont leave it for writing up from memory even half an hour later) the following particulars.

SIZE. Preferably in comparison with some common and familiar bird such as house sparrow, myna, crow, kite, vulture.

COLOUR. Overall coloration, with associated colours and any arresting feature or pattern such as black cap, pale or white bars, spots or patches on the wings at rest and/or in flight, bands in tail, etc. Also anything striking about bill (stout or slender, curved, hooked, long), and crest (pointed, mop-like, fan-like, etc.), and tail (long, short, pointed, rounded, square ended, graduated, etc.). Legs (long, short, colour, etc.). Any other details which strike you. Even an indifferent sketch may sometimes help.

Just as important as the above, I think, is a general description of the environment in which the bird was seen: grassy slope, upland meadow, scree fan, cliff, conifer or broad-leaved forest, rhododendron scrub, etc.

Also whether the bird was singly by itself or in company (pair, small party, flock, etc.) and details concerning its habits and behaviour such as whether on the ground (running or hopping) or perched (upright or horizontal). Flight (whether by rapid wing beats or punctuated with glides, straight, zigzag or dipping). Whether shy or tame. Whether silent or calling or singing (render call if possible, or compare it to nearest known sound).

Useful books to take: INDIAN HILL BIRDS, BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, PICTURE BOOK OF SIKKIM BIRDS, BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE.

Good binoculars essential.

Sálim Ali

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PLUMAGE PROBLEMS

Beginners in bird-watching who rely on Whistler's HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS or Sálim Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS should not have much difficulty in learning the differences between male and female plumages in birds which show sexual dimorphism. But even in these excellent guides, there are a few omissions which might cause worry to the novice.

While the books point out that juvenile Brahminy Kites and vultures have special plumages and juvenile drongos have white spotted bellies and vents, they fail to draw attention to the juvenile plumage of that very common bird, the Blackheaded Oriole. The blackish bill and the ill-defined black of the head, and the stippled chin and breast make the juvenile oriole look

quite different from the adult. I think that the beginner should know of the existence of this plumage phase. Apart from having a black or blackish bill, the juvenile Blackheaded Oriole has a 'food call' which is quite different from the notes uttered by adults. Often it is this food call (a kyāeyip note) that puzzles the beginner and leads him to the greater puzzle of a black-billed Oriole!

Again, the juvenile Magpie Robin's stippled brown chin and throat are not mentioned in these books, though that does not very much matter as the adults are bound to be in attendance. In the oriole's case this is not always so. I have found birds in juvenile plumage going about alone for hours.

Another similar omission is the distinct juvenile phase of the Bronzewinged Jacana. It differs strikingly from the black-and-bronze adult, and the young bird often goes about at a distance from the adults.

Baker and Inglis's BIRDS OF SOUTH INDIA (Madras, 1930) is the most misleading in this respect, as it pretends to have given all plumage phases. In the case of the Bronzewinged Jacana, though it gives a full description of the juvenile plumage, it reproduces a coloured picture of the juvenile without any indication that it is NOT the adult plumage!

I am sure other bird watchers will add to the list of minor traps for the unwary novice.

K.K. Neelakantan

REVIEWS

BIRD WATCHING FOR BEGINNERS. By Bruce Campbell. pp. 237. Penguin. 2s. 6d.

In addressing himself to school age youngsters who might wish to take up bird watching as a serious hobby -- Bruce Campbell begins this book from fundamentals -- while at the same time he keeps in mind the fact that most British schoolboys are likely to have a good background of knowledge of natural history. He divides this book into 3 parts. The first part is a general introduction in which he explains among other things, the classification of birds into different orders and families. Sharp definitions like 'Individuals of a species normally breed with each other and with the individuals of no other species' make it easy to remember many basic facts easily. In the second part, groups of birds are described beginning, in the old fashioned way, with the passerines and going on right through to the Pigeons and game birds. The last section of the book is

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devoted to discussing the problems of bird watching. This section is likely to be of the greatest interest to Indian readers. The aim of serious bird watching is, after all to arrive at some conclusion which must have some significance within the large body of knowledge of natural history. Mr. Campbell shows how to carry out bird counts surveys, how to study migration, and the best way of studying nesting habits and general behaviour. By giving the beginner in bird watching a clear picture of what his goal should be and by giving him lucid directions on how to get there, Mr. Campbell's book is likely to turn an aimless hobby into a serious interest for many people.

Although this is a workmanlike volume, with no luxurious colour plates, the black and white pictures are of a very high standard, while there are many useful maps and diagrams.

(Mrs.) Laeeq Futehally

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PRAKRUTINA LADAKWAYA PANKHIO. By Vijaya Gupta Maurya. pp. 280. Sastu Sahitya Vardhak Karyalaya, Bhadra, Ahmedabad. Price Rs 2.

Those readers of the Newsletter who can read Gujarati will find this a useful introductory book about birds. It gives short information on about 475 of the common birds of this country. The language is simple and each description is generally accompanied by a photograph.

The birds have been grouped in 12 different categories according to their characteristics, and the names of birds are given in Gujarati as well as in English. The book is well worth its price.

J.J. Mistry

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Last month we received an incredibly generous gift from Mr. Samir Sen, F.Z.S., Hazaribagh. He has sent in four volumes of Stuart Baker's WIDIFICATION OF THE BIRDS OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE "for the library of the Indian Ornithological Society". These books which are now out of print, have apart from their intrinsic worth a great historical value. They were the foundation on which later ornithologists in this country have been able to build. The volumes are in excellent condition and have been housed as carefully as they deserve to be.

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We have decided to organize a Bird Watching Competition on Sunday, 18 March 1962. The Competition is open to all and a

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copy of Sálím Ali's 6th edition of THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS will be awarded to the winner.

1) Competitors have to report in English, names of all species of birds seen between sunrise and sunset on Sunday, 18th March. The person submitting the largest list will be declared the winner.

2) Entries must be submitted on the lines of the following questionnaire:

- a) Species
- b) Locality where bird seen (Roadside, Garden, Built up area, near fresh water, salt water, in flight).
- c) Whether single, pair or flock (if so, approximate number)
- d) On ground, bush, or tree
- e) Time, when bird seen.

3) Entries must be submitted by 21st March to the nearest Regional Editor from amongst those whose addresses are given below:

Dr. Sálím Ali, 33 Pali Hill, Bandra, Bombay 50
K.S. Lavkumar, Rajkumar College, Rajkot
Y.S. Shivraj Kumar, The Palace, Jasdan, Saurashtra
Mrs. Usha Ganguli, 10 Cavalry Lines, Delhi 6
Mr. E.D. Avari, Bengal Natural History Society,
Darjeeling
Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N., Naval HQ, New Delhi
Dr. Biswamoy Biswas, Indian Museum, Zoological Survey
of India, Calcutta 13
Mr. Joseph George, Central Building, Research Institute,
Roorkee (U.P.)
Mrs. Jamal Ara, 4 European Bachelors' Quarters, Doranda,
Hinoo P.O., Ranchi, Bihar
Prof. K.K. Neelakantan, Govt. College, Chittur, Kerala
Mr. Zafar Futehally, 32A Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58.

4) The decision of the Regional Editor will be final as to the correctness of an entry in a competitor's list.

It will be appreciated if intending competitors inform the Regional Editor in advance of their intention to join the competition.

* * * *

We have been rather careless in the past in not explaining the location of places mentioned in our articles. Amends are now being made:

Najafgarh Jheel, about 20 miles north of Delhi

Kelghar, in Satara District, Maharashtra.

CORRESPONDENCE

In Shri Janakiraman's note on pp. 4/5 of the February 1962 issue of the Newsletter, I have two queries:

1. How did he differentiate male from female? There is no superficial difference in the sexes. If it was only on presumption, this should have been stated.

2. Is he quite sure that he did, in fact, see sticks being carried to the nest by the bird "held in its legs" (feet?). I have not seen this in a babbler or, as far as I can recall in any passerine bird.

Is one to understand by "The male took shelter with his partner in the nest" that both birds incubate together or sleep in the nest together? This would also need confirmation.

In the way it is worded, it would seem that all 3 eggs were laid on the same day. This is surely not what the writer meant. If he did, then I am afraid it is difficult to swallow!

Another matter. I think in a previous Newsletter some one had taken exception to Najafgarh being mentioned without any indication of where it is situated in case a reader wished to visit it. I think when publishing Capt. Tyabji's note the editor should have taken the opportunity to make good the omission.

Sálim Ali

/Mr. Janakiraman has written to say that a reply is being forwarded. -- ED.7

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I would like to know if the pair referred to by Janakiraman in 'Love's Labour Lost' (Newsletter 2(2):4/5) were members of a 'seven-sisterhood', and if so, what role the other members of the flock played during nesting. Would be useful if such notes had a summary attached, e.g. date on which the pair apparently started courtship activities: 9.12.61, date on which 1st twig was laid down: 16.12.61, date on which nest-building was com-

pleted: 22.12.61, etc.

K.K. Neelakantan

/Mr. Janakiram please note. -- ED.7

* * * *

I am so glad you are getting up such a strong editorial team for the proposed Ornithological Journal. I would suggest that members should be encouraged to volunteer to do special research in watching special, selected birds in addition to general bird watching, just as Dr. Salim Ali specialises on Weaver Birds in addition to being a specialist on all birds.

Hamid A. Ali, I.C.S. (Retd.)

* * * *

I write first to congratulate you on the Newsletter which I enjoy greatly receiving each month. I find I have very little time for systematic bird watching at present but I am always delighted to be reminded about it. I find also that many more people are taking an interest in it and I shall certainly do my best to bring the Newsletter to their notice.

Lt.-Gen. Sir Harold Williams,
Roorkee

* * * *

I was very much interested to see an account of Prof. Neelakantan's trip to a creek in Andhra Pradesh.

I was one of the members of the field team of the Virus Research Centre, Poona, during 1956-57 and stayed for several months in the Krishna-Godavari delta area. I wonder whether Prof. Neelakantan visited one particular spot, a village called Arredu, on the Bhimavaram-Tadepallegudum road. This place is about 15 miles from Bhimavaram. There were many Spotbilled Pelicans nesting there, during December to February. We have seen them flying near Colair Lake, which is another 10 miles from Arredu as the crow flies. This is a large and beautiful lake (the river Upputeru leads to this) which abounds in plenty of bird life. This lake is the breeding locale for many species of water birds and that breeding activity has been observed in most months of the year. It is a paradise for bird watchers.

P.K. Rajagopalan,
VRC Field Station, Sagara (Shimoga).

* * * *

ROSY PASTOR

I saw my first Rosy Pastor on a Coral Tree (pangara) in Horniman Circle on the 10th February. I hope to see more birds on this tree in the coming days.

I had been to St. Xavier's School on the 11th and saw about 8 to 10 Rosy Pastors on a similar tree. On this tree they were easily noticeable. They were chattering as usual trying to drive away the crows and parakeets.

B.A. Palkhiwalla

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Bird Watchers
Juhu Lane, Andheri,
Bombay 58.

SUBSCRIPTION

Readers who have not yet paid their subscriptions for the current year are requested to send them either by money order or by cheques to the name of Zafar Futehally.

BHES/WFO BIRD MIGRATION FIELD PROJECT

Recovery of Ringed Birds

Ring No.	Species	Date of Ringing	Place of Ringing	Recovered on	Place of Recovery	Remarks
A-4886	<u>Motacilla alba</u> (<u>dukhunensis</u>)	17.3.61	Asambia Near Mandvi, Kutch ca 22° 51'N 69° 32'E	June- July 1961.	Kirov, USSR. ca 58° 35'N x 49° 40'E	Distance ca. 4500 km (2800 miles) in straight line.
A-5458	<u>Motacilla flava</u> ssp.	14.5.61	Eharatpur, Rajasthan, ca. 27° 13'N 77° 32'E.	25.6.61	Kirghizia, USSR, ca. 41° 55'N 74° 30'E	Distance ca. 1900 km (1200 miles) in straight line.

With the compliments of
Dr. Salim Ali,
Chief Investigator BHES/WFO.

editorial board

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NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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STUDY THE LIVING BIRD

(A talk delivered by Dr. Salim Ali to the Himalayan
Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling)

Non-climbing naturalists have always envied mountaineers their opportunities of reaching places far above the physical ceiling of the average wind and limb. At the same time they have deplored the one-track tendency of mountaineers to walk up that mountain and down again without bringing with them any of the information concerning high altitude natural history for which their opportunities were so eminently suited. This is particularly so with birds of the higher Himalayas regarding which our knowledge is lamentably scanty. And birds, because of their conspicuous coloration, wide ranging aerial movements, and diurnal habits are so much easier to observe without special effort than most other groups of animals. As an example, let us take the Blue Grandala - for which there is unfortunately no better understood name. It is a bird of the size of the Starling - slightly smaller than the familiar Myna - with a shape, flight, and bearing strongly reminiscent of the Blue Rock Thrush. It lives in large flocks in the Himalayas from Kashmir to Bhutan and farther east into western China. In severe winters the birds are sometimes forced down as low as 9000 ft., and rarely even lower. Normally it keeps much higher, breeding in summer between 14,000 and 20,000 ft. The male is a gorgeous creature of brilliant silky purple- and ultramarine blue plumage, therefore even when not in a flock sufficiently conspicuous for even the most 'blinkerred' mountaineer. Since 1911 when perhaps the only one or two known nests were first discovered, numerous mountaineering expeditions and/or individual mountaineers must have crossed and recrossed the bird's breeding range, yet not an iota of significant information concerning its biology has been added, and we continue in ignorance about the simplest facts relating to it. And the Grandala is by no means the only high elevation bird that suffers this way. It is therefore gratifying to find that many mountaineers themselves - including your distinguished principal who is the initiator of this lecture - have realized that perhaps mountaineers are not doing as much service to biological science, despite their physical exertions and notable achievements, as their peculiar opportunities render possible. With a little simple instruction about what to observe and how to go about it, every mountaineer should be able not only to add to his own enjoyment but also to take fuller advantage of his opportunities of contributing to the general store of knowledge. It is the aim of this talk to offer some practical hints on bird watching in

the hope and expectation of increasing the enjoyment of the mountaineers themselves while at the same time encouraging a fuller utilization of their unique opportunities for furthering the study of mountain birds.

The chief reason why people watch birds is undoubtedly the aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction to be derived from their beautiful plumage, vivacious movements and lovely songs. The enjoyment is doubled by the fact that birds are usually at their best in places far removed from the haunts of man, away from the noise and bustle of towns and cities — the madding crowd — on the wooded countryside, often amidst surroundings of great natural beauty. A trek in the Himalayas becomes doubly exhilarating if one is alive to the changes that take place in the bird life as one progresses from one level to another. The popularity of bird-watching as an outdoor 'sport' in most countries of Europe and in America is truly amazing. Often almost every parish, or what we call moholla, has a bird club of some sort, with a membership that ranges from schoolboys and schoolgirls to venerable old men and women, and from farm and industrial labourers to university professors and cabinet ministers. Among these are usually to be found some who have become seasoned field ornithologists, whose company, contact, and guidance have helped and inspired many amateurs to make valuable contributions to science. In the context of all this widespread enthusiasm and competence in western countries it is disheartening to review the position in India, in spite of our opportunities for bird watching being so much more lavish. But apart from its aesthetic and cultural value, the healthful enjoyment it affords in the out-of-doors, the training it imparts to the powers of critical observation and deduction and all that, purposeful bird watching has the great advantage of adding to scientific knowledge without the need of any specialized zoological training or of elaborate and expensive apparatus. Normally all that is needed — and this I consider the sine qua non — is a good pair of field glasses, a note book and pencil, an ample stock of patience and the ability to record accurately and objectively without permitting oneself to be unduly swayed by prejudice or sentimentality, or by what one may have read in books. A suitable camera is a useful accessory of the bird watcher's tools and can often provide telling evidence.

Though widely prevalent, it is a completely mistaken notion that serious bird study in India can only be done in a museum or laboratory, or by shooting and collecting specimens, and that since all the birds of our country are already classified and catalogued there is nothing more to be done, especially by the so-called amateur. It is true that we do know fairly well from museum collections what species of birds are found in India, what each one looks like, what parts of the country they inhabit, what types of general environment they frequent, and other broad facts of this sort. We also know the nests and eggs of most, yet not all, of our birds, and which species are to be met with throughout the year and which only as winter visitors. Besides these broad generalizations we know practically nothing. Our most pressing need at the moment is the study of the living bird in its undisturbed native environment and under natural conditions — life

history studies covering all aspects of its habits and behaviour, day to day, month to month, and year to year, throughout the bird's life - in short, how the bird lives. Behaviour patterns of birds are now considered of equal importance to morphology in determining phylogenetic relationships, and intensive behaviour studies in recent years have helped significantly in re-orienting some of our notions connected with systematics and evolution.

The scientific field study of birds, which is merely a mature stage of bird watching, has an important bearing on human ecology and economics. Birds are both beneficial and harmful to man and his interests in a variety of ways. A proper scientific approach to, and assessment of, their economic status is of the highest importance, especially in a country like India which leans so heavily for its prosperity on agriculture and forestry, and where the spectre of growing more food for the spawning population is for ever staring us in the face.

The very first essential for any one who wishes to enjoy birds in nature, and to add to our store of knowledge, is to be able to recognize a bird in the field and to tag a correct name to it. This is the ABC of pleasurable and purposeful bird watching. The alphabet must first be mastered before any sort of word making game can begin. For this, I am afraid, there is no royal road. Only by cultivating a habit of careful observation and meticulous note-taking, and unrelaxing perseverance, can the goal be attained. In the absence of a knowledgeable companion in the field (which of course is the easiest and pleasantest way of learning), and where only guide books have to be relied on, some extra effort and more perseverance will be needed; and unless your notes contain the pertinent pointers and a good illustration is available for reference the mystery may sometimes remain unsolved. Guide books illustrating all the birds you are likely to meet in every area are non-existent, and one covering the whole of India would moreover be impracticable on account of its bulk, considering that we have here 1200 full species (or over 2000 forms) to reckon with. The standard manual, now out-dated and also out of print, on the birds of the 'British Indian Empire' covering India, Burma and Ceylon by Stuart Baker (in the Fauna of British India series) runs into six descriptive volumes. It contains practically no illustrations and thus is not of much use to the beginner. The books I consider most useful for him are my own THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, and INDIAN HILL BIRDS, and Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS. A fourth which I find quite as useful as the other three is THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE by Peterson, Mountfort and Hollom. It contains excellent coloured illustrations of a great many of the migrants that visit us in winter from Europe and E. and C. Asia. The thing to do when you come across an unfamiliar bird is first of all to note down on the spot (don't leave it for writing up from memory even half an hour later!) the following particulars:

SIZE. Preferably in comparison with some common and familiar bird such as house sparrow, myna, crow, etc.

COLOUR. Overall coloration, with associated colours and any arresting

pattern such as black cap, pale or white bars, spots or patches on wing at rest and/or in flight, bands in tail, etc. Also anything striking about bill (stout or slender, curved, long), and crest (pointed, mop-like, fan-like, etc.), and tail (long, short, pointed, rounded, square, graduated, etc.). Legs - long or short (length and colour)

Any other details which strike you.

And just as important as the above, I think, is a description of the type of country you saw the bird in: grassy slope, upland meadow, cree fan, cliff, conifer or broad leafed forest, rhododendron scrub, etc. Also whether singly by itself, or in company (pair, small party, large flock, etc.) and details concerning its habits and behaviour such as whether on the ground, perched (upright or horizontal), or running, or hopping; flight whether by rapid wing beats or punctuated with glides, straight, zigzag or dipping, etc.; whether shy or tame; whether silent or calling or singing (render call if possible). It is always an advantage, and often easier too, to compare the bird in every respective detail with some familiar or well-known species or object wherever possible.

All these things together have collectively come to be known as the 'jizz' of a bird. Dont ask me for the origin of this word, but it epitomizes everything that goes to help field identification and is well understood by bird watchers. Success in running a species to earth will depend largely upon the detail and accuracy with which your observations are recorded. Assisted by a good bird book, the exercise is every bit as absorbing as a cross-word puzzle, and besides being a good way of spending an evening in camp, is far more satisfying when the clues lead to a correct or plausible solution.

(To be continued)

MIGRATORY WAGTAILS IN KERALA

The extensive paddy lands in the Kuttanad area of Kerala, Alleppey District, provide a very good feeding ground for migratory wagtails and other birds. Every year enormous swarms of wagtails, chiefly the Yellow (Motacilla flava), come here about November and remain till the middle of March or the beginning of April.

Having previously participated in the field camps of the BNHS/WHO Migration Study Project, I realized the importance of locating the roosts of wagtails for successful large scale netting and ringing. One day while exploring the reed beds at sunset, some wagtails were observed flocking high up and flying off in a south-easterly direction. Thinking that this might provide us with some clue to their roost, we repaired to the same spot a bit earlier next day and waited for their flocking. At 5.17 p.m. two birds rose in the air and began to fly about in their typical undulating fashion (flapping alternated with gliding) with a sharp chiccheep or weesp uttered at frequent

intervals. Slowly they were joined by their companions and all began to move off in the same direction as yesterday. Other flocks were also noted flying in the same south-easterly direction, the last flock to leave the fields being at 6.07 p.m. This gave us an idea. Why not track down these birds to their roost? They started leaving the place at 5.17 p.m. and would have to reach the roost before dark at the latest, i.e. 6.35 p.m.; that is, during an interval of 60 to 90 minutes.

Allowing for a speed of 30 to 35 miles per hour at the outside, we calculated that the roost must lie within 40 miles of this place. So from the next day onwards we started trailing the wagtails. Since the birds flew direct and cross country, mechanical transport was ruled out and the only method for us was 'foot slogging'. We waited for the first flock to appear in the sky, then followed till the last flock disappeared in the falling dusk. For this we had a maximum of only 60 to 70 minutes each evening. The intervening irrigation canals and paddy cultivation held up progress and necessitated a tortuous zigzag route. The birds flew at a great height and could just be seen with difficulty as motes in the darkening sky. On overcast evenings their sharp distinctive calls, produced at frequent intervals, were our only guide.

After ten days of tracking in this way -- a couple of miles further each evening -- the flocks of wagtails were seen descending to a height of 30 or 40 feet in an area of sugar cane cultivation. This was the first sugar cane plantation we had encountered so far. By now we had reached Muthoor, two miles north-west of Thiruvalla.

Next day we arrived on the spot earlier than usual and rummaged eagerly in the nearby areas for a likely roost, then waited anxiously for the birds to come. The birds came, descended a little, but instead of dropping there they slowly rose again and continued in the usual south-easterly direction. We waited for the second flock hoping that that at least might settle somewhere in the sugar cane plantation. Disappointingly enough flock after flock behaved in the same tantalizing way, and passed on. Not a single bird dropped into the cane. Only one thing kept us from giving up the chase in despair -- the conviction that we were without doubt getting closer to the roost since by this time we had already followed them till 6.05 p.m.

From the twelfth day on we also started watching the outward flights of the wagtails towards their feeding grounds in the morning. We observed the direction the flocks were coming from and then moved speedily forward to meet them. Then we waited for the next flock and repeated the manoeuvre. Since these birds leave their roost before sunrise, the morning mist and bad visibility made this slow work.

On the thirteenth day of what was beginning to look very like a wild goose chase, we took up our position some two miles away from the previous day's point. We chose this spot because it was a large area -- 20 to 25 acres -- of unbroken sugar cane plantation, comparatively free from human disturbance. The sharp weesp, weesp notes were the first indication we received as it

was a cloudy day. To our dismay, we found all the birds coming from the west and flying directly across to the east, and not in the direction noted heretofore! Could they already have changed their roost? With thoughts like these we slumped down dejectedly in the field, heedless of the flocks overhead, to discuss our further course of action.

Local enquiries suggested that there were some places in the neighbourhood where the birds were suspected to be roosting, and we spent the next two days in investigating them. The information proved correct in so far as we did find some roosts, but they proved to be not of wagtails but of Blackhead-ed and Spotted Munias!

On the sixteenth day we again reverted to the point at which we had left off three days before. And next day we at last had the good luck to discover, after full seventeen days of tracking, our first roost. By the time we arrived at the place all the wagtails had settled into the cane for the night, but their sharp subdued squeaks helped us to locate the exact spot. The acrid smell of birds' excreta peculiar to such gathering places confirmed their presence within, and for once we whole-heartedly relished the 'aroma'. The communal roosting place lay at a distance of 15 to 25 miles across the country from the Kuttanad paddy fields. It is difficult to understand why the wagtails do not use the reed beds almost adjacent to their feeding grounds rather than make a journey of 20 to 50 miles back and forth each day. Can it be that the exercise is meant to keep them in condition for the long northward migration they will soon be undertaking? With the help of electric torches it was found that the birds were roosting on the sugar cane leaves individually, and not huddled together.

The first flock of wagtails that arrives at the roosting ground in the evening circles round and round in a disorderly rabble high up above the cane fields. This usually happens some 30 to 45 minutes before sunset. Gradually other flocks join it and the sky overhead becomes a seething mass of undulating specks which are these dainty little birds. Their number is beyond estimation; one can only compare them with locusts swarms. It is a fantastic spectacle, the sky from horizon to horizon full of layer upon layer of milling wagtails. Settling for the night starts just before dark and continues in all for about 20 to 30 minutes from the first arrivals of single scouts or small parties. The birds drop directly into the cane from a height of 50 to 100 ft. at a steep angle and lightning speed, first in twos and threes then in dozens and scores, looking like a shower of falling leaves -- and reminiscent also of wounded birds dropping to a 'browning' shot in the thick of an overhead flock. The settled birds as well as those still on the wing frequently utter their characteristic wasp notes, and even after all have settled the squeaking continues for 10 to 15 minutes. Later there is complete silence.

We were particularly cautious in operating the mist nets on the first day. Previous experience with other birds had taught us that a roost disturbed means a roost lost; and after the time and labour that had been spent in

locating this roost we were in no mood to lose it. Therefore next day we left the place alone, and only watched the reaction to the netting. In the evening the wagtails arrived in the same number as before. Reassured by this we did our netting daily thereafter; disturbance shortly after settling seemed to make no difference in the numbers at the roost.

Local people often disturb the wagtails at night and try to make them abandon a roost because the green leaves of the sugarcane, used as cattle feed, are rendered unfit for the purpose by the large amount of excreta matted on them by the birds. Also because of the nasty smell of the excreta peculiar to such large bird colonies. As a matter of fact on two occasions it was this strong smell that had guided us to roosts over considerable distances. If disturbed by the farmers while in the process of settling, the birds return to the same roost soon after dark when the men have left. Thus the wagtails here are quite conditioned to this sort of human disturbance, and our netting activities did not prevent them from continuing to occupy the roosts.

We also noted the behaviour of wagtails disturbed after 7 o'clock, when quite dark. They very rarely utter any sound during the night. On our first day's netting, in order to drive the birds into the nets we threw stones and sticks into the roost. We could hear no squeaks or other sound, but only a prolonged swish like the heavy pattering of distant rain on the cane field produced by their flying up and resettling on the leaves. Even when seriously disturbed they would not leave the roost for the night. They sometimes took to the air above the field, but soon resettled in the cane.

By sunrise, or very soon after, all birds had departed. Successive parties and flocks took off from the leaves with swishing sound, rose above the cane field high up in the air and headed directly and purposefully towards the Kuttanad paddy lands. If there is fallow land adjoining the roost the birds usually dip to fly low over it and then ascend gradually to their normal commuting height of 2 to 300 feet. It is indeed a thrilling and almost unbelievable sight. Nobody will believe me if I say that 10 to 12,000 wagtails roost in this one acre of sugarcane here. The actual number may well be twice this guarded estimate; and there are many other such acres dotted about in this area!

At the roost at Kuttoor, near Thiruvalla, where we first commenced our netting, the sugarcane was about 11 to 14 ft. high. The thickness of the growth made penetration into the field practically impossible. The saw-edges and sharp spines on the leaves added to the difficulty. At first we cleared a lane through the sugarcane to erect our nets in. We kept the nets at their normal height of about 10 ft. They were all up by 5 p.m. The birds duly arrived in their thousands, and by 6.45 all had settled. One of us then slowly crept in to see the result of our labours. It was a most disheartening sight. Some of the nets had taken only 3 or 4 birds each, while others were quite empty! That evening more than 6000 birds were estimated to have come. What had happened to them all?

On the second day we decided to change our technique and to raise the nets to the level of the sugarcane tops, 13 to 14 feet. As usual the swarms of wagtails arrived and settled in before 7 o'clock. The improvement was immediate. An average of 10 to 12 birds was found in every net without any driving being necessary. That day we took 200 birds in 16 nets. This same method was employed in our further operations in this area. However, after five consecutive days of netting the collection fell to 31 birds.

This seems difficult to account for as the birds coming to the roost showed no apparent decrease. Fortunately we had meanwhile discovered a much bigger roost of wagtails at Edanad, 2 miles east of Changannur. So we shifted our camp to that neighbourhood. On the first day we were rather delayed, and fortunately (as it proved later) there wasn't sufficient time to clear a lane inside the sugarcane so we erected the nets immediately outside the field along its boundary with an adjacent plot under tapioca. In due time the skyful of wagtails appeared and dropped into the cane in the usual manner. Two of us now got inside the sugarcane and disturbed the birds from the opposite direction towards the nets. The wagtails in trying to escape flew straight into the line of nets along the edge of the field. In this way 80 birds were taken in 7 nets. The easy success of this method did away with the laborious necessity of cutting lanes within the sugarcane. From now on we adopted this new method of erecting lines of high nets close along the edge of the sugarcane and stampeding the roosting birds into them. We also found it more satisfactory to hold the netted birds overnight under a mosquito net, and to ring, measure, weigh, examine for ticks, and release them in the morning. In this way casualties were also considerably minimized.

Between the two camps, Kuttoor and Edanad, a total of 1896 wagtails were ringed in 20 days netting. Unfortunately the work had to be suspended when our supply of rings gave out. Next November we should keep ourselves adequately prepared for continuing the activity throughout the winter sojourn of the wagtails in Kerala. The total catch was made up as under:

<u>Motacilla flava</u>	<u>beema</u>	...	...	670
-----	<u>thunbergi</u>	...	...	441
-----	<u>melanogrisea</u>	...	...	282
-----	<u>simillima</u>	...	...	179
-----	<u>ssp.?</u>	...	...	157
-----	<u>citreola</u> ssp.	...	...	133
-----	<u>indica</u>	...	...	33
<u>Acrocephalus dumetorum</u>		...	...	1
				<u>1896.</u>

The Forest Wagtail of which 1 to 5 examples were taken each day, sharing the same roost with the others, probably came from the neighbouring homestead gardens (or 'kampongs'). Only a single recapture of a Yellow Wagtail was recorded from the same roost as it was caught at and ringed exactly two weeks previously. Owing to a shortage of trained helpers, the de-ticking

could unfortunately only be done rather hurriedly and superficially. Even so it is noteworthy that of over 1700 birds examined, not a single one was found positive for ticks.

P.V. George, M.Sc.

COURTSHIP AND MATING OF THE BLACK DRONGO

Date: 2 May, 1948: Place: Kavasseri, a village in Palghat Dt., Kerala. Time: 1500 hrs. Weather: Cloudy.

In a laterite field full of that leguminous shrub that local farmers grow seasonally to serve as green manure, there was one bush taller than the others. On top of this 2-foot bush sat a Black Drongo (King Crow). With drooping and quivering wings, it looked up and uttered a rapid series of short notes. Just then a second Black Drongo flew towards the spot; and, alighting on a similar bush some 30 feet away, called in the same manner. Bird 1 flew towards the newcomer (B.D. 2), alighted on the ground under the bush, and sat with its whole body pressed to the ground, its head alone lifted up stiffly (exactly like a man doing the Yogic pose called: 'bhujangaasana'). It uttered a rapid series of sharp notes. B.D. 2 then jumped down and started dancing in a semi-circle around the other. The dance had, as accompaniment, another series of chirps, rapidly uttered. The dancer lifted up its body as much as it could, kept the legs stiff, raised and held the tail at an angle like that of the Magpie Robin, and keeping the wings half open made them quiver exactly as a young bird does on being fed by an adult. The dance was a short affair lasting some 30 seconds and consisted of dignified goose-stepping. The dancer (B.D. 2) began moving from one flank of the other (B.D. 1), and on coming in line with B.D. 1's bill, jumped on to the back of B.D. 1 and trod for a moment.

After this brief act they squatted side by side on the ground and called. The female (B.D. 1) then stood up, took a step or two, stood with its body and tail held horizontally, wings drooping and quivering, and called for a short while. The other did not respond. The female then flew off and was immediately followed by the male.

There was no 'mock-fighting' before or after the act.

K.K. Neelakantan

SUNBIRDS 'FLYCATCHING'

Purple Sunbirds have been reported to engage in aerial flycatching in places as far apart as Gujarat and Dehra Dun (Newsletter Vol. 1, Nos. 7 and 8).

One evening in February I saw three male Purple Sunbirds flycatching from the tops of trees in the garden of Lt.-Gen. Sir Harold Williams in Roorkee (U.P.). It was a clear evening and birds were very active in the garden.

The Sunbirds were seen flycatching intermittently for a period of two hours.

Joseph George,
Central Building Research Institute
Roorkee

THE SPOTTED OWLET, ATHENE BRAMA

This little owlet, known locally as the 'kuch-kuchwa', has for some years occupied the back of a false jilmil (wooden window shutter), in the upper storey of our house. My wife and I started watching these amusing little birds about December 1957. Each year since a pair has taken possession of the 'lodge', which at other times is taken by the Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis).

The first year we were most interested to see that the owlets were a trio to start with, but one was persistently driven away, and finally the pair brought up a family of five chicks. We were lucky to see what appeared to be their first flight as a family. The parent birds definitely shepherded their five young from the nest to a Bargad Tree, a distance of about 50 yards. After a few minutes rest the family took off again, on a longer flight, to some 'Chir' trees (Pinus longifolia), a distance of about a 100 yards this time.

The smallest and weakest of the young took a lot of coaxing by the parents, before it took courage and embarked on its second flight. They never returned to the 'lodge' again that season. The following two years, what seemed to be the same pair, from their habits and behaviour, returned, and each time they produced a brood.

This present season, my wife being in England, I have watched alone, and am convinced that they are not the old pair. Also this year it appears that they are a threesome again. The broken slat of the jilmil forms a verandah for their 'lodge', and on several occasions I have seen the three of them sitting huddled together.

Whistler mentions that they are often to be seen in groups of threes or fours. It would be interesting to know whether they practice polyandry, or are polygamous. They are definitely adult birds.

J.H.H. Peppe,
Birdpur Estate, Basti, Uttar Pradesh

REVIEW

THE HOUSE ON THE SHORE. By Eric Ennion. pp.xv 200, 16 black-and-white plates and over 70 illustrations in text. London, 1960. Routledge and Kegan Paul. Price 28s.

Before the war Eric Ennion spent his working hours as a medical practitioner

and his spare time as a bird artist. After the war he decided to give up his work and spend all his time on his hobby. He bought a large house on a piece of coast line in North England which had a fine population of migrants and turned it into a Bird Observatory. This book is all about his house on the shore and all the things he has seen and done in it.

The greatest part of the work of the observatory is trapping and ringing. Dr. Ennion seems to use scores of different kinds of traps, each kind perhaps, tailor made to suit a particular species. He gives clear and accurate pictures of them and carefully describes their characteristics and drawbacks. He admits that finally it is the Japanese mist nets which get better results than all the different kinds of nets and traps. It sounds almost impossible to instruct a novice, without a physical demonstration exactly how to release birds from the nets. But, by using lively sketches and judicious words Dr. Ennion manages to do so. This part of the book - and it is a fairly long section - still rings a nostalgic bell for all those who have taken part in the WHO Migration Study camps in Saurashtra and elsewhere. Dr. Ennion complains that he is plagued by cows walking through his invisible nets. It will be recalled that here too wandering cattle sometimes used to bring netting to a standstill.

Hundreds of people of all ages and from every walk of life come to stay at the Monks House Observatory every year. Depending on their experience and capacity they help in the work of netting and banding or they do bird counts and surveys or they merely do birdwatching to please themselves. Even a week long stay at the observatory is a significant step in the lives of most people in persuading them to become serious ornithologists.

Eric Ennion is, as I said before, well known for his bird sketches. He has a strong distinctive style of drawing. He seems to catch the essence of the bird and with his robust angular lines he gives it movement and vitality, at the same time he slightly conventionalizes it and makes his picture a sophisticated design in black and white. The author has been generous with his sketches - indeed the relationship between the written text and the sketches is so intimate that it becomes easy to see the disadvantage suffered by other writers who have to hire a stranger artist to illustrate their books.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

More books for our Library

Mr. Samir Sen's gesture of presenting us with Stuart Baker's volumes has resulted in a chain reaction. Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Williams and Mr. J.H.H. Peppe have both offered to send us the volumes of Jerdon's BIRDS OF INDIA.

Incidentally if any of our readers are interested in reading The Ring magazine which is being sent to us on an exchange basis we could arrange to circulate it. * * * *

Birdwatching Competition

As we go to 'press' a number of interesting entries have come in but a full report will be given in the next issue after all the regional editors have submitted the list of Winners.

CORRESPONDENCE

Talking of swifts (Lavkumar's note, Newsletter, Vol. 2(3):6-7) reminds me of a problem. A swift is said to be unable to visit the ground. Yet its nest is composed of feathers, grass and straw cemented together with saliva. Where and how does it collect the feathers, grass and straw? It generally flies at a great speed. Is it possible to collect the nesting material while flying at that speed? I should be grateful for definite information on the subject.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

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Reply to the queries of Dr. Salim Ali in the Newsletter, Vol. 2(3):13, March 1962.

1. There is no sex dimorphism in the case of Grey Babblers. Sexes were differentiated purely by the behaviour of the pair. When one takes a close watch of a pair nearly a fortnight and where the behaviour of the male and female are clearly distinct it is not very difficult to assess the sexes. This was not stated clearly in my note.

2. (a) The fact that the twigs were brought held in their legs (feet) was quite true. This was a surprise to me when I saw it for the first time. Hence I made a special notice of this and noted down as below from 16th to 18th in my field diary:

16th Dec. about 9 a.m., the suspected male of the Grey Babbler pair brought the twig held in its feet. This is to be watched carefully as it is not common in passerines.

17th Dec. Morning, 4 times in the morning and twice in the evening the twigs were brought held in their legs.

18th Dec. Thrice in the morning and 7 times in the afternoon sticks were brought held in their feet.

Hence though it was an uncommon thing I purposely put it 'sometimes the twigs were brought in their legs and some times in their beaks.'

(b) 'The male took shelter with his partner in the nest'. The pair used to return to their nest between 5.30 and 5.45 p.m. The female entered the nest first. The male took shelter in the nest at 7 p.m. After that they were silent. By the time the male got entry in the nest it was very dark and I could not observe anything clearly as to whether they sleep or incubate. Hence I wrote they took shelter in the nest.

(c) As Dr. Salim Ali himself puts it, certainly I did not mean that the eggs (all the three) were laid on the same day. When the nest was in the process of making I did not want to climb on that tree to observe the nest from close quarters since it might disturb the pair. (In a previous case when I did it the bulbul pair left that nest uncared and they did not come back to that place at all. This happened to me in last March at Javli.) Hence I was waiting for them to complete the nest. When the nest was completed on 23 December, 24th morning I did climb that tree and saw the three eggs placed more or less in the centre. However, I think that egg-laying should have commenced when the nest was in the process of making.

Reply to Prof. K.K. Neelakantan's question in the above issue of the Newsletter

No doubt the Grey Babblers belong to a seven sisterhood. When the nesting pair goes out in the morning in search of food they readily mix with the other members of the sisterhood and take part in the happy chorus too. This particular pair was seen on 17.12'61, when followed, mingling with a sisterhood which was already calling happily in chorus in a jowari field near by. In the evening when they returned the male was the first to trace the tract, followed by the female. However, no other member of the sisterhood was seen taking part in the nest building activities.

Once the particular pair under observation goes and mingles with another sisterhood it becomes impossible to isolate and single out one bird as they are all of the same colour and the sexes are alike. Unless some marking or tagging device is adopted the social behaviour of such birds in detail cannot be worked out.

K. Janakiraman

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NEWSLETTER

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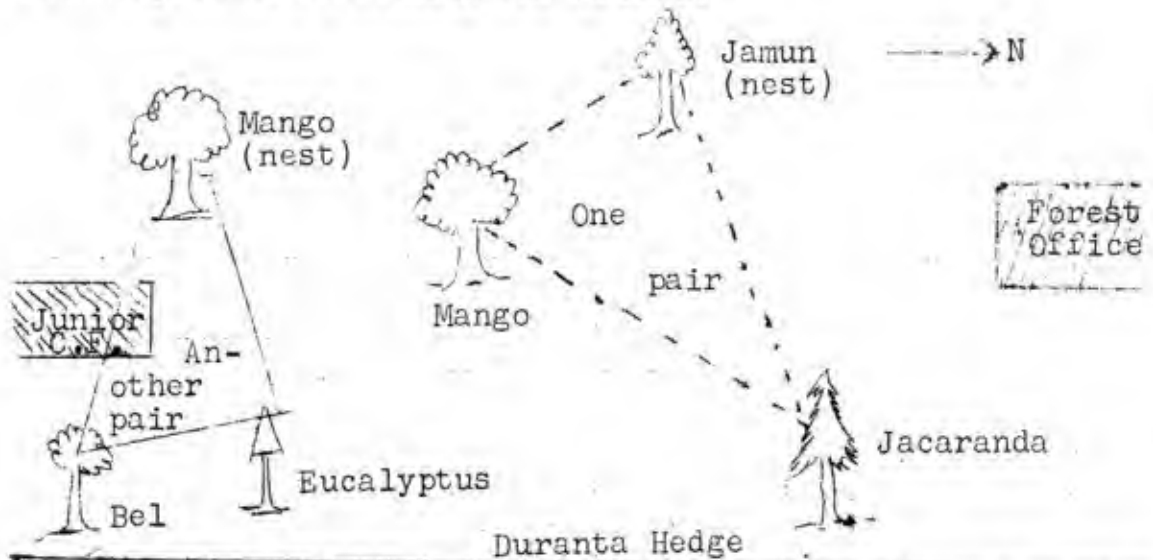
THE CRIMSONBREASTED BARBET, MEGALAIMA
HAEMACEPHALA

In Ranchi, the Crimsonbreasted Barbet starts excavating its nest as early as December, though the eggs are not due till the first week of May. Initially the work proceeds at a very leisurely pace, sometimes, the excavation being left off for two days on end. Much of the excavation is carried out in the afternoon. As Spring approaches, the tapping becomes frenzied and so powerful, as to be heard quite some distance away. By March the nest hole is ready. I have rarely seen them use old nesting holes.

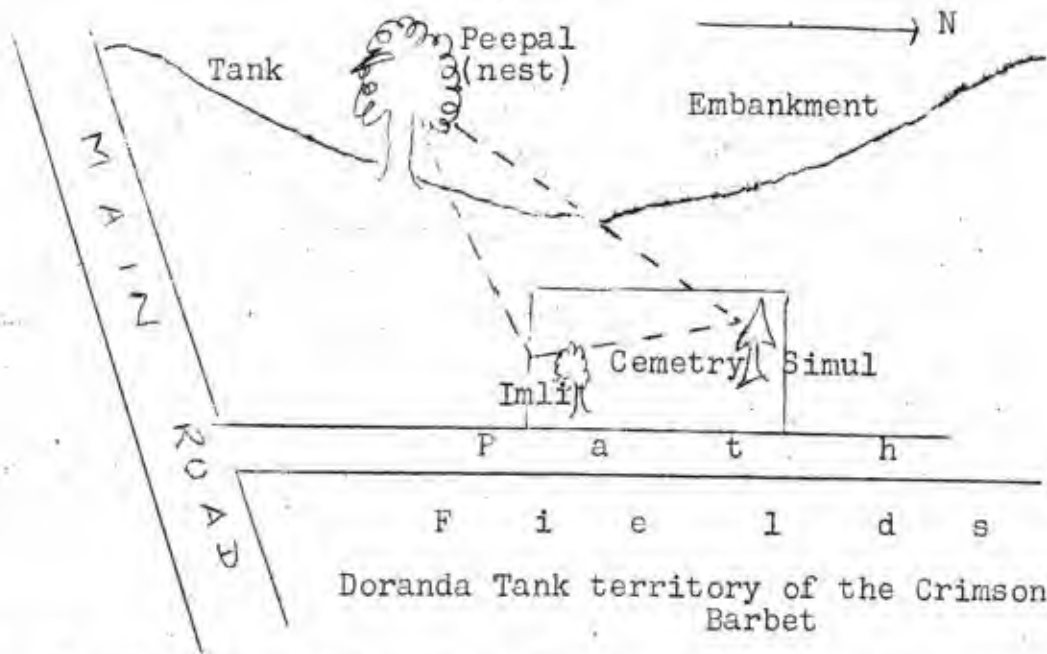
By February the display starts. It consists of the male chasing the female from branch to branch, with slightly fanned tail wagging up and down quickly, drooping wings and breast pressed close, dragged along the branches in a deliberate hopping movement, to the accompaniment of khir-r-r-r-like notes, in a soft key. When she happens to be motionless, he postures before her, uttering khir-r-r-r, puffing his feathers resembling a ball, and fluttering the wings like a butterfly. With the khir-r-r-r continuing, jerking the head, he circles round her in a slow dancing movement. If she shivers her body, and calls very softly, che-che-che, almost in her throat, mating takes place. Mating is often successive, twice within a few seconds. During mating, his wings quiver frantically, and the khir-r-r-r becomes faster, but continues soft. Mating over, he changes into his normal tonk-tonk.

The territory is always a triangle and roughly isosceles, though the area covered varies. Three field sketches, not strictly to scale, show the territories of three different pairs. The territory is guarded only against its own kind. If another Barbet invades, the khir-r-r-r is uttered furiously, and the invader is pushed at the point of the beak. If the invader is obstinate, a fight breaks out, with beaks interlocked, which is often so strong that both the birds roll and tumble in the air, but part

suddenly before reaching the ground.



Forest Office Compound, Doranda. Territories of Crimsonbreasted Barbet



Doranda Tank territory of the Crimsonbreasted Barbet

The female generally sits close, and scrapes the lower edge of the nest with her beak. Insects dislodged are captured for food. The male very rarely feeds her. If he comes with food, he utters the same khir-r-r-r note, and she then pops out her head to take the food.

The fledglings leave the nest when monsoon showers drench the land. Then casualties among them are heavy, through tree-falls during storms. Also while learning to fly they wet their wings, fall to the ground, and are captured by crows.

(Mrs.) Jamal Ara

SWALLOWS AND SWIFTS COMMON TO THE INDIAN REGION

I would like to refer my readers to my article on these birds in No. 3 of this volume. This key is, as I have said, prepared for the species of the Hirundidae and Swifts which I have personally observed, and which are found throughout the plains of India. I have not included the very many types of swifts which occur in the Himalayas, or, for that matter, possibly in the Western Ghats and the Nilgiris. If I had included the many types of swifts which are seen in the Himalayas, then I am sure I would have made things very confusing for myself and for my readers, who are largely, I hope, beginners as well as those with seasoned records. Nor could I have rightly claimed to have watched these mountain swifts sufficiently intimately so as to include them in the key. They are, therefore, best left out. I have also not mentioned the Pied House Martins, which I have seen only in the highest of the Himalayan valleys, and the Nilgiri House Swallow which I have never seen, and I would be most grateful, if those who have observed these birds and know them better than I, could write further about them.

Regarding the distribution of these birds appearing in my key, I would just say that they are widely distributed, and beyond this, I would not like to comment further, for I might well be wrong. I suggest that for a detailed distribution, it is best to refer to some standard bird book.

One of the interesting characters I would like to mention which differentiates the Martins and Swallows on one hand and the Swifts on the other is that, the former alight on the ground, and perch on wires and along ledges. The latter/ and never visit the ground, and cling to perpendicular surfaces. Swifts drink by skimming over water, which the swallows and martins do not generally do. These points should have appeared under I and II of B in the key.

Here is a list of all the Swifts and Swallows found in the Indian region. Those which featured in my key are marked by asterisks

A complete list of Swifts occurring in the Indian Region:

Indian Edible-nest Swiftlet	Khasi Hills Swift
Malaysian Edible-nest Swiftlet	The Swift*
Grey-rumped Swiftlet	Large Whiterumped Swift
White-breasted Swiftlet	House Swift*
Whitethroated Spinetail	Palm Swift*
Alpine Swift*	Crested Swift*
Whiterumped Spinetail	

A complete list of Swallows and Martins occurring in the Indian Region:

Collared Sand Martin	House Swallow
Plain Sand Martin*	Wiretailed Swallow*
Crag Martin*	Indian Cliff Swallow*
Dusky Crag Martin*	Striated, or Redrumped Swallow
Pale Crag Martin	House Martin
Swallow*	Nepal House Martin

It would indeed be a great help to all birdwatchers, if other readers could try to add to the asterisks to the above list, and make my key comprehensive.

K.S. Lavkumar

THE REDTAILED SKINK AS A FOOD FOR BIRDS

The Redtailed Skink (Mabuya sp.) known as bawni in Hindustani is a small, active glossy lizard, with a striped body and a red tail, about 4 to 6 inches in length.

Recently I saw the Magpie Robin, the Brown Shrike, and the Hoopoe eat it. A friend also reported having seen the Indian Robin trying to kill it. On two occasions the Magpie Robin brought a skink to our lawn before eating it. On neither occasion did I see him kill the lizard. On the first occasion the lizard was brought almost dead, as I saw no movement. Beginning from the head, the Magpie Robin passed the whole skink through his bill down to the tail without eating it and pressing it slowly all the while. This process was repeated twice, and then he swallowed it head first. On the second occasion when he alighted with the skink, he dropped it on the lawn, and it lay upside down, apparently dead. But he flew off soon after, as he was chased by a Redvented Bulbul who wanted to deprive him of his prey, and so I could not see how he ate it. I think he killed the lizard where he found it before bringing it to our lawn. Carrying a wriggling lizard of that size held in the bill would have been a difficult task.

..... 5

The Brown Shrike, which is an uncommon winter visitor in Delhi, has been visiting my neighbour's compound for the last few days. I saw him sitting on a lime tree. Near his head was a Redtailed Skink hanging from a thorn, and he craned his neck to take a bite! On close inspection I found the skink with its head impaled on a thorn and its tail missing!

A friend has also watched an Indian Robin trying to land on a Redtailed Skink which was moving away very fast. The robin once landed on the skink and tried to hold it with his feet and to peck at it when the lizard coiled itself up. The bird eventually failed to hold it and the lizard escaped.

I once watched a Hoopoe kill and eat this lizard. He was foraging near the garage when suddenly I saw him bash something against the ground, which squirmed. I thought it was a centipede. I sought the aid of binoculars and saw that it was a skink. By that time it had lost its tail in the struggle and was trying hard to escape. But the Hoopoe bashed it and pecked at it repeatedly, only at the two ends of the body with its enormous pointed bill. The lizard was incapacitated. The bird then turned to the still wriggling tail, and jabbed at it before swallowing it. It jabbed at the body a few more times, tore it up into bits and swallowed the remains.

I was under the impression that a Hoopoe only kills helpless and inoffensive worms and caterpillars. It was surprising to see it kill a fast-moving lizard like a skink which is said to hiss and try to bite when at bay! I wish I could see how the Hoopoe caught the lizard in the first instance. I guess that these lizards were probably in a state of semi-hibernation when they were attacked.

All the five skinks that I have mentioned were killed or attacked between December 12 and February 20, which perhaps explains their initial disadvantage.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

STUDY THE LIVING BIRD

(Continued from Newsletter Vol. 2, No. 4: 4, April '62)

Birds as a class are less affected by heat and cold than almost any other animals. Their feather covering is an efficient insulating mechanism and helps to retain the body heat in winter. They are also otherwise better adapted to resist cold than mammals, owing to the absence of richly vascular exposed appendages like external ears, and tail, although these are much reduced in high altitude and arctic land mammals.

Most small birds in winter do not need the protection of caves etc. or hibernation as mammals do. Lack of food, whose requirement is relatively high in small birds, rather than the direct effect of cold is responsible for their migration to lower levels. Some mountain species with a selective diet are restricted in their distribution to the zone where their special food is available. A good example is the Himalayan Nutcracker, a member of the crow family (Corvidae) whose range -- 6000 and 12,000 ft.-- coincides with that of certain pines, e.g. Chalthooza, on whose nuts it is largely dependent. Nutcrackers habitually lay in large stores of pine nuts in tree holes and cavities for use in winter thereby ensuring their special food supply in unfavourable weather.

On the other hand the Nutcracker's relative, the Raven which has a widely omnivorous diet ranges from plains level in N. India in winter up to 20,000 ft. in summer, feeding on carrion, the leavings of nomadic graziers' camps, young and sickly birds and mammals, and anything else it can come by. Its world distribution extends from the tropics to the poles. Although they do not possess any very special adaptations for high altitude living, true mountain birds have longer wings than their lowland representatives for stronger flight in order to cope with the high winds that usually prevail. Wind seems to be the greatest enemy of birds at high altitudes. Hingston (Mount Everest Expedition, 1924) found that small birds spent much of their time in the protection of boulders and depressions to avoid the fierce winds. Many concentrated in the vicinity of villages where protection from wind was available. A few birds like Mountain Finches took refuge in the entrance of Mouse Hare burrows. But all the same, Redstarts nested at 17,000 ft. and Lammergeiers soared at 20,000 ft. Subcutaneous fat acts as thermal insulator, a little pads of fat are found under the toes of birds like Snowfinches which run about and feed on the snow. In high mountains cliff-nesting birds are frequent, e.g. eagles, falcons, ravens, and swifts. The Wall Creeper, a square tailed grey bird like the nuthatch with bright crimson in its wings and a peculiar fluttering butterfly-like flight has adapted itself to a rock and cliff habitat. I met it near Dolma La in western Tibet at about 18,500 ft., apparently nesting in June. It descends in winter into the foothills and northern plains and has even been observed in New Delhi on the walls of the Central Government Secretariat which it no doubt mistook for Mount Olympus!

Other species typical of the Alpine zone are Mountain Finches (Leucosticte) and Accentors. But on the whole resident insectivorous birds are rare here owing to the scarcity of their normal food.

In mountain ranges that run east to west along more or less the same latitude, as in the case of the Himalayas and many of the major ranges in north Asia - the Altai, Karakoram, Hindu Kush, and others - the pattern of bird distribution is very different from ranges that run north and south across many degrees of latitude, e.g. the Andes. In the former the bird life of the northern and southern slopes are largely distinct owing to the range acting as a physical barrier for many species. In the latter, on the contrary, the mountain range serves as a highway for dispersal of polar and temperate forms farther south. It is the birds of the eastern and western slopes of the Andes that show similar divergences.

Some of the most urgently needed data which mountaineers can procure for us concerns bird migration. In spite of the fact that birds from northern trans-Himalayan lands make their appearance in India in enormous numbers during autumn and spend the winter months here, and make their way out again in spring we know exceedingly little about the routes they take and other details of their movements. Our knowledge, such as it is, is based largely on the scrappy and rather haphazard observations, chiefly of army officers fortuitously posted in the strategic N.W.F. Province in the last 80 years or so. These relate chiefly to duck, geese, and cranes, largely from the sportsman's point of view. We have to acknowledge our debt to these men, some of whom were keen field ornithologists whose observations are of the greatest value. They form the hard core of practically all that we know about bird migration in India. But the observations need to be continued and intensified. In general, they point to the conclusion that the main migratory route, at any rate in the case of ducks and geese, between northern and central Asia and northern India is the Indus Valley in the northwest. Similar scraps of information from the northeast suggest that from northeastern Asia the Brahmaputra Valley provides the flyway. These migrational streams converge down the two sides of the peninsula weakening as they advance southward, and they trickle over into Ceylon which virtually forms their terminal.

But increasing evidence procured by mountaineers within recent years - as yet rather scanty and often diffuse - indicates that many species may also fly directly over even some of the highest parts of the mountain barrier, often at unsuspected heights, thereby shortening their journeys very considerably. In his *EPIC OF EVEREST* (1925) Sir Francis Younghusband writes that several migrating birds were observed in September at 17,000 ft. and above, among them Temminck's Stint, Painted Snipe (?), Pintail Snipe, House Martin, and several pipits. More than once they heard migrating waders at night, curlew being unmistakable.

C.H. Donald in Kashmir observed geese coming from Tso Morari and Pangkong lakes in Ladakh making a bee-line for Chamba, Lahoul, and Bhadarwa and over Kablass at 14,000 ft. Meinertzhagen has also observed early autumn passage of ducks at Khardong in Ladakh over 13,500 ft. and in the Changchenmo Valley over 14,500 ft. Eric Shipton (BLANK ON THE MAP, 1938) reports finding strewn on many glaciers at 15-16,000 ft. in the Karakoram the frozen remains of large numbers of duck and crane (?) "a big bird with legs longer than my arm" which had evidently been killed by a strike of bad weather while crossing the range. Last but not least, Brigadier Gyan Singh on his Everest climb (May 1960) found three specimens of the Eastern Steppe Eagle (Aquila n. nipalensis) lying dead on the South Col at 26,000 ft. - where also Tensing had reported others on a previous expedition - evidently killed by freakish weather while on passage over what may well be its regular route between C. Asia and N. India where it is a fairly common winter visitor. It is probable that thermal air currents, commonly present over river valleys and mountain passes, which migrating birds are known to use, present narrow channels in the ocean of air which facilitate traffic.

We have now sufficient observational evidence of this kind to suggest that perhaps a far greater amount of passage takes place directly over the high Himalayas than has hitherto been supposed. Natu La (pass) at 14,000 ft. in Sikkim is reported to be a regular flyway East to West from the Chumbi Valley into Sikkim. (Phoenicurus aureus, Acanthis flavirostris, Turdus kessleri, Montifringilla blanfordi, M. ruficollis have been observed on passage here.) There are certain well-known passes of this type in the European Alps through which migration regularly takes place on a vast scale every spring and autumn. One such is the celebrated Bretolet (about 7000 ft.?) on the Swiss-Italian border where the Swiss Ornithological Society maintains a ringing field station. The magnitude of the seasonal traffic here may be gauged from the fact that during a period of six weeks in autumn recently that station caught and ringed over 19,000 birds. And this represents only a small fraction of the birds that either escaped or failed to fall into the nets! In the last 2 or 3 years, by a stroke of good luck, the Bombay Natural History Society has been enabled to start a long dreamt-organized programme for netting and ringing migratory passerine land birds such as warblers, wagtails, pipits, and chats. Our field work has so far been confined to Kutch and Saurashtra since a great deal of migration is known to occur over the Great Rann of Kutch at the appropriate seasons. However, the country here is too uniformly flat and expansive, and presents no points of concentration or 'funneling' of migrants as through mountain passes with the result that our catches have

not proved particularly spectacular. From reports and indications, there seems no doubt that many suitable places like the Alpine pass of Bretolet must occur even at moderate elevations in the Himalayas where rewarding netting and ringing can be done. But about such we have no definite confirmation. We must leave it to our mountaineer-ornithologists to discover them for us. And to do this they must cultivate the habit of watching birds, and complete competence in identifying what they see.

Sālim Ali

MATINS AND VESPERS ON 9 JUNE, 1957

Early in June 1957, someone sent me a cutting from The Mail of Madras. It was a letter to the Editor from a Mr. Noble Rollin, appealing to all bird watchers to time the first songs and last songs of as many birds as possible on 9 June. The records were to be sent to the World Bird Research Station, Glanton, Northumberland. Though I felt obliged to try recording first songs and last songs of birds in Palghat town (Kerala), somehow I forgot to send my notes to the Research Station. Perhaps it might interest some readers of the Newsletter, and even persuade others who failed to send their own notes to the Research Station, to publish them in the Newsletter.

Weather: Rain regular for 7 days - 1st to 7th. No rain on the 8th. On the 8th the night sky was almost cloudless.

I got up only at 5.00 a.m. Sky slightly cloudy. A breeze stirring north to south.

First calls:

- 5.10 : Crows
- 5.15 : Koels*. Between 5.15 and 5.18, eight Koels were heard water-bubbling. No kkuow calls.
- 5.15 : Crow-Pheasant*. hud-hud-hud... calls
(5.29: first crow to fly over)
- 5.30 : Farmyard Cock
- (5.35: Light enough to read by)
- 5.37 : Whitebreasted Waterhen*; Whitebreasted Kingfisher
- (5.40: first Pond Heron to fly over)
- 5.43 : gok-gok-gok (of Chestnut Bittern??*)
- 5.50 : Common Myna
- 5.52 : Whitebrowed Bulbul
- 5.55 : Tailor Bird
- 6.00 : Iora, and Flowerpecker

(The Municipal siren for 6.00 blew when my watch showed 6.01)

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Evening: No rain all day. Almost clear sky. Only a few clouds here and there at 6.00 p.m. (18.00 hr.). There was too much interference from motor cars, children, and nagaswarams for this to be a reliable guide!

- 18.35 : Last Roseringed Parakeet call
- 18.39 : Last Tailor Bird
- 18.45 : Last Common Myna
- 18.50 : Pied Crested Cuckoo*, and Chestnut Bittern*
- 18.58 : Crow-Pheasant*
- 19.10 : Koel*, and Whitebreasted Kingfisher

Birds with an asterisk after their names cannot be said to conform with the notion of first call and last call, as they call even at midnight. On moonlit nights even crows may be heard, especially during the breeding season, calling at all hours of the night. I have heard a Crow-Pheasant calling loudly after being disturbed by a couple of Mottled Woodowls in the middle of the night.

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan

DELHI BIRD NOTES

The Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher, Rhipidura aureola

This species has been observed by me twice in the Delhi area during 1961 on 18th April and 23rd December to be exact. On the first occasion the bird was observed in a roadside tree going through its full repertoire of energetic evolutions on a branch with occasional sallies into the air after winged insects. It was under observation for a short period only as it took wing soon after my arrival and disappeared into a neighbouring garden.

The second sighting in December was made on the lawns of the Lodi Gardens. The bird remained on the ground for approximately 30 minutes after first sighting during which period it covered about 200 yards moving along the ground in jerky but graceful movement. It would stop every few feet, flick open its rounded fanlike tail and pirouette with grace and poise; interspersed with all this movement were lightening sallies into the air to snap up winged prey.

The White-eye, Zosterops palpebrosa

The bird may be observed and heard in most gardens and parks in the Delhi area at this season, and has been seen regularly in flocks of about 5 to 20. One morning in mid January three of these birds were seen on chrysanthemum blooms in com-

pany with an equal number of the Lesser Whitethroat, exploring possibilities. The next morning at about the same time a flock of about 10 birds was seen on a Poinsettia, now in full bloom, flitting from flower to flower taking in the nectar.

However, the largest concentration of White-eye yet observed by me was on the evening of 26th January this year -- about 100 birds in two flocks of approximately 50 each. They were busy working their way systematically through the hedges in the compound of a large colony of service flats in follow-my-leader fashion uttering a single note call as if to indicate their position. These birds remained in the colony compound for about 45 minutes before passing on to fresh feeding grounds.

An interesting feature of the sighting was the fact that though the two flocks comprising about 100 or more birds were in the area at the same time they remained in two distinct flocks throughout, each confining itself to a separate length of hedge.

The Common Indian Rosefinch, Carpodacus erythrinus

A small flock of these birds (about 10) were seen on 17th December 1961 in the Lodi Gardens first on the ground in short dried grass and later on a neem where they perched silent most of the time under observation (about 10 minutes).

It may be of interest that in this flock only two males in full adult plumage were observed, whereas the rest of the flock was evidently a mixture of hens and immature males in female plumage.

Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.

Note: The Lodi Gardens is an old park in the residential area of New Delhi; rolling lawns and open 'forest' of mango, neem, eucalyptus, gul-mohar, some babool, etc.; shrubbery mostly lantana; groves of pomogranate and guava.

WHITESPOTTED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER

A resonant many-syllabled song of a breeding bird used to warn me of the arrival of dawn in the small hours of the day in May last year.

On May 22, I identified the singers, a pair of Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura albogularis) building a nest on the branch of a mango tree, about 6 ft. above the ground. The nearest window of my house in a suburb of Bombay was about 10 feet away from the nest, but the foliage provided ample cover for the nest to remain well hidden from sight. At this stage the nest was a tiny knot of cobweb.

The Song: I distinguished 11 notes in the long whistling song, and these notes would occupy about the same time as one would take to say Why-don't-you-let-me-tell-you-how-to-do-it. The last 6 notes are delivered much quicker than the first five.

The Nest: My period of watching was restricted to about 30 to 40 minutes each morning. I could not distinguish between male and female. The pair would work on the nest by turns. Each bird would collect material from a distance of about a hundred feet of the site of the nest, and would wait on an adjacent branch till the partner finished its bit. Each bird would be at the nest for about 2 minutes fitting the new bit of material into the tiny knot that was the foundation. By May 26 the nest had taken the shape of a cup about 3 inches high and 2½ inches wide at the brim. After the cup had come into being each builder would pour its body into it (with a strand of fibre held across in the bill) and would turn itself either way fitting the strand into the fabric of the cup.

The builders did not live on the tree they were building on. Each morning these would emerge from a thick tract of scrub jungle about 200 yards away. The birds would not approach the nest directly but fly past it once or twice and sit on another branch for a few seconds before going to the nest. On May 28 (the only day I watched them in the evening) I saw the birds work on the nest at 4 p.m. On May 31, I counted about 10 visits to the nest by the pair within a space of 40 minutes. I suspected the eggs to have been laid by then, but could never make sure as on the very next day some wanton intruder demolished the nest. The long whistling song continued to reverberate in the morning air throughout June emerging from the fastness of the scrub jungle. Perhaps it was the same pair building again.

'Earphones'

REVIEW

BIRDS WILD AND FREE. By A.W.P. Robertson. pp. xii 208, 45 black and white plates. London, first published 1950. Bodley Head. Price 16s.

Commander Robertson seems to be a master in the art of using his leisure for purposeful and well-organized bird watching. On one occasion he decided to find out what went on in exactly one acre of a friend's swamp garden. He collected nine keen young naturalists and they arranged to take turns in watching all the nests in the area, taking photographs where possible.

The scientific care with which data was collected and kept allowed them to make many new observations, and to come to useful general conclusions. "It is not until one has a large number of nests under constant and simultaneous observation that one appreciates the small percentage of birds that reach the free-flying stage. Another point which emerged strikingly was the prodigious amount of insect pests that were destroyed daily in the feeding of the young". One hen Chaffinch, for instance "accounted for 1680 green caterpillars in one full day."

Although Commander Robertson's photographs are excellent, it is his easy and entertaining manner of describing his meticulous observations which make his book unusual. It is not often that one finds a book which is good fun to read and which is, at the same time, worth careful study. Such a book can only be written by someone who knows his subject much better than he knows the palm of his hand.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Bird watching Competition

Our bird watching competition which took place on the 18th of March this year was a success in a modest kind of way. There were 33 entries from all over India; a very small percentage of these were such that, as a regional editor put it, 'they need not be taken seriously'. Most of the entries were, however, of a high standard. The report received from K.S. Lavkumar shows that he was impressed by the quality of the entries he received (8 entries from Mayo College, and 4 from Rajkumar College). He writes 'I would like to congratulate all the young competitors for their effort, even those youngsters who had bravely put down white leghorns on their lists! The winner of the competition was Lokesh Khanna of Mayo College with 115 entries; Omkar-sinh Jadeja of Rajkumar College was the runner up with 98 entries. We give below a regional break-up of the number of entries received with the highest authenticated total.

Region	Received through	No. of entries	Highest authenticated total
Delhi & Nainital	Mrs. Usha Ganguli	2	55
Dehra Dun	Mr. George Joseph	7	76
Ranchi	Mrs. Jamal Ara	4	63
Kerala	Prof. K.K. Neelakantan	2	39
Bombay/Poona	Mr. Z. Futehally	5	63
Assam	Mr. E.D. Avari	1	27
Ajmer & Rajkot	K.S. Lavkumar	12	115
			98

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It is hoped that we shall be able to make this competition a yearly event.

CORRESPONDENCE

Bird News from Rajkot (2nd half of March)

..... Rosy Pastors are here clattering away in the Ficus trees which are at the moment loaded with figs. They are all in their adult plumage and the flocks are increasing numbers. This is the usual pattern of their movements before their great northern migration later in April.

The watersides are progressively becoming less and less populated by duck and waders, and those that are still around are very restless and will be away soon. However this month has been memorable in that we saw a group of five Mallard, one drake and four duck, on the Lalpuri lake among rushy water at its ablation end. These duck which I am told are the commonest duck in Britain, are not plentiful here and one hardly ever comes across them and it is an event for comment even for the regular shikaris who spend so much time after ducks, harrying them while they are here. Garganey are the commonest duck on the lakes and rivers around Rajkot, and next come the Shovellers and Common Teal. I believe that the resident Nukta is on the increase while it is possible that the Cotton Teal is also spreading its range as the amount of artificial water reserves are increasing. Unfortunately, there is very little cover as grass is grazed close by cattle, and even the rushes are used for thatching by the peasantry and so the natural habitats around the edges of lakes are not really increasing much for breeding birds, and for those with secretive habits.

..... Among the migrants, the Redbreasted Flycatchers have departed, and I have not heard them for a week, while the Tree Pipits are still around but in fewer numbers. I have not seen any Black Redstarts during the week.

..... I must here mention that the Green Bee-eaters which are here the year round, have now broken up into pairs and some of them have already selected embankments where very shortly they will be burrowing their tunnels, as will the vociferous White-breasted Kingfishers. There is certainly an expectancy in the air, which permits the last of the winter visitors to make a quiet and unnoticed exist.

K.S. Lavkumar,
Rajkumar College, Rajkot

* * *
Strange food of House Sparrow

At Jaipur, we find House Sparrows, Passer domesticus Linnaeus,

tending their nestlings from March to September. This year (1961) also six sparrows laid three eggs each at various places in our house. Later on it was found, however, that the nests had only two nestlings -- obviously one egg from every nest was destroyed or remained unhatched. In each case the period of incubation was 14 days.

One morning at about 5 a.m. when the sparrows were still in their nests, we found a dead tail-less, young house gecko, Hemidactylus flaviviridis, about 30 mm. long, which was removed to a corner. As the birds started their daily routine the dead creature became an object of curiosity. A dozen sparrows -- nine males and three females -- gathered around it, flittered their wings and chirruped loudly. One of the females boldly caught hold of the lizard in between its beak and flew off to its nest. She placed the gecko outside her nest, broke some pieces and the waiting nestlings were given their breakfast. Thereafter, the mother sparrow swallowed the remaining lizard.

It has been usually observed that the House Sparrows (both sexes) feed their nestlings on insects but the adults are vegetarian. A vertebrate being given to nestling and also eaten by the mother was rather surprising.

Ishwar Prakash & (Mrs.) Lakshmi I.
Prakash,
Maharaja's College, Jaipur.

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The Wall Creeper in Roorkee

A Wall Creeper was seen on the Asian-African Hostel, University of Roorkee, Roorkee, during the period February 20 to March 3. It is perhaps more correct to say that the Wall Creeper was seen in the Hostel, because the bird did not do much creeping on the red ochre painted brick walls of the building. Instead, it spent much of its time hopping along verandahs, ledges, and hanging chajjas, entering doorways, and climbing the wire netting of fly-proof door shutters.

The weathered and mildewed top portions of the exterior walls received some attention from the bird. Those portions of the walls where efflorescence had occurred were also systematically examined for insects.

A brick-lined rain water drain and an earthen embankment were other feeding grounds for the bird.

Joseph George, Roorkee,
U.P.

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Leaf Warbler hawking Mosquitoes

I watched with great interest on 29 Mar. a Phylloscopus circling round and round a sewage tank exhaust pipe hawking mosquitoes issuing out of the air hole!

N.G. Pillai,
Trichur, Kerala

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Spread of Civilization & Bird Life

You attribute the present scarcity of bird life in India to the spread of civilization. So far as my observation goes the change came quite suddenly about 12 years ago, whereas civilization has been extending gradually since ancient times.

I used to watch regularly for the first winter arrivals, and noticed one year they were scarce; the next year there were none, nor have any appeared since. I refer chiefly to Redstarts and Wagtails. I am afraid there is something about the Indian climate or atmosphere repellent to many species of birds -- something unperceived by our senses.

P.V. Beatty,
Garha, Jabalpur, M.P.

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The Maroon Oriole in Roorkee, Uttar Pradesh

While General Williams and I were watching birds in his garden in Roorkee on March 14, we saw a Maroon Oriole (Oriolus traillii)

The liquid notes of an oriole were heard for some time before the bird was seen flying from one flowering semul tree to another. After feeding from a few flowers the bird flew on to yet another semul tree.

The range of the bird is given by Ripley as 'the Himalayan foothills.....from the edge of the plains to 6000 feet'. Roorkee is in the plains at the edge of the foothills. So the above observation should be worth recording.

Joseph George

Zafar Futehally
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
Juhu Lane, Andheri
Bombay 58

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THE SEARCH FOR MIGRATORY BIRD ROOSTS IN DELHI AND BHARATPUR

In early April 1962 I had the pleasure to work with Dr. Salim Ali at the bird ringing camp set up at the Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary in Bharatpur, Rajasthan. The ringing project was being financed by the World Health Organization (a branch of the United Nations) as a part of their study of the transmission of virus diseases.

Research in the past has shown that some diseases are caused by viruses which are carried in the bodies of ticks. The present study involved not only the usual ringing, weighing, and wing measurement, but a careful examination of the birds for ticks.

But the ringing programme had almost been a flop. Were it not for two lucky discoveries, the camp would have ended after ringing only a small number of birds.

One evening, before I arrived, some members of the ringing team chanced to be on one of the many bunds in the Ghana, late in the evening. Suddenly, as if they were falling from the clouds, thousands of chirping wagtails materialized. Wagtails filled the sky as far as the eye could see. The birds dive into beds of cattail (Typha) to roost for the night. This is just what the team had been looking for.

The next evening the ringing team returned to the scene and placed several of the nearly-invisible mist nets in and around a small clump of cattails. Of course, to make it even more exciting, there wasn't a wagtail in sight as the nets were put up. Had they only imagined all those birds the night before?

No, they hadn't. The birds repeated their fantastic performances. The evening I witnessed the spectacle we netted 162 wagtails in about half an hour (almost all were of three races of Yellow Wagtail, but we also had Yellowheaded and White Wagtails). It took two ringing teams until midnight to ring and examine, and release, all the birds.

The second day I was there I was treated to another, even more

exciting surprise.

It seems that Dr. Ali had been telling his troubles (the poor catch of birds) to the Maharaja of Bharatpur. 'Oh', His Highness said, 'I saw a lot of birds out near Barcula village the other night. Why don't you try out there?'

So they did.

The night after I was introduced to the wagtails, I went out with the team to a place near Barouls village, about seven miles from Bharatpur on the road to Deeg. All I could see were a few migrating collared bushchats, along with the common resident birds. But I had learned to keep my mouth shut after the night before. I would wait a while before I became sceptical.

The Jeep staggered cross country a short distance, and we stopped on the edge of a large area of thin, short thorn 'forest'. The nylon mist nets were hung upon some bamboo poles and put up in front of some of the thorn bushes. We waited.

As the sun sank lower in the west, a few small flocks of birds began arriving from the east and northeast - Spanish sparrows, redheaded buntings, and rosy pastors. Soon the flocks increased in size and frequency, and before long the sky was full of thousands of birds -- mostly Spanish sparrows, who come to India from the Mediterranean countries to spend their winter. The male Spanish sparrow can be easily distinguished from the common house sparrow, and should be looked for in the winter. The top of the head is chocolate, not grey; and the sides are heavily marked with black streaks, rather than unmarked as in the house sparrow. Otherwise, it closely resembles the house sparrow in appearance and habits. The females cannot be distinguished from female house sparrows in the field.

Just before dark we removed the birds which had become entangled in the nets and placed them in the holding bags. Then we went to the bushes where sparrows had settled for the night -- many of the bushes were literally alive with birds. While three men held a net on one side of the bush, two of us would flail the other side with bamboo poles, to drive out the drowsy birds. When the birds flew out they were surely surprised to find themselves caught by an invisible trap, and quickly transferred with their friends to the holding bags.

Two nights we caught and banded sparrows and buncings at this roost (the rosy pastors were wary and difficult to catch). The second night we filled all the bags to capacity and, working till one o'clock in the morning, we ringed 244 Spanish sparrows. They are beautiful little birds, but those seed-cracking bills

of theirs can be pretty painful when they grab hold of a stray finger.

Those are the two migratory bird roosts discovered in Bharatpur. The bird ringing team in Kerala, I understand, discovered another, and in early May I discovered the wagtail roost in Delhi.

One evening Mrs. Usha Ganguli and I went to Okhla, a part of the Jumna River south of Delhi, where water is diverted to the Agra Canal. There we saw hundreds of wagtails on the sandbars -- almost all of them were Yellow Wagtails, of the blackheaded and ashyheaded races. Just before dark the birds flew off in a southerly direction.

The next day I got out a large scale map (one inch to the mile) of the area and tried to guess where the birds would roost.

Three miles south of Okhla, I could see on the map, was a marshy area next to the canal. That looked like as good a risk as any, so that evening I cruised up and down the canal road until I saw a flock of wagtails pass overhead. Matters were confused somewhat, though, because hundred of weaver birds were also flying to their roosts. I managed to follow the flocks of wagtails as they were tossed around in the strong wind, and, sure enough, they came down by the marsh -- which was almost entirely composed of a large expanse of cattails.

I got out of the car and saw a field of stubble literally covered with birds, almost all of which were in full plumage. Just before dark the wagtails all disappeared into the cattails and were silent, but the mass of weaver birds on the north side of the marsh were very noisy until it became quite dark (I don't know how long they were noisy, for I left at dark).

As a result of this discovery the Delhi bird-ringing effort will get a big boost -- mostly because more birds can be ringed with a given amount of effort. The more birds we ring, the greater chance we have of a recovery being made, and the more recoveries that are made the more we will know about the habits, distribution, and migration of our birds.

It might be interesting to note that in some areas I know (in the United States), several species have been added to the state check lists after bird ringing began -- because the birds turned up in the nets but had never been observed in the field before. There is no reason to doubt that the same result will be the case in India, especially with some of the confusing warblers, once the ringing programme gets underway.

Bird roosts can be found by using a technique that is used to find wild bee hives. Watch the bird, or birds, that you think is going to roost until it is out of sight. Go to the spot where you last saw the bird, take a sight on a new bird going in the same direction, and watch him until he is out of sight. This procedure is continued until the roost is found. (If I remember correctly, the roost in Kerala was found in this manner. It took over a week to find the roost.)

Topographic maps are also helpful, and a good guess with the aid of a map may save a lot of the trouble of the cross-country hiking. Maps, with a scale of one mile to the inch, or four miles to the inch -- which covers more territory but has less detail -- may be obtained for almost all of India except border and troubled areas, from the Map Sales Office, Barracks A, Janpath, New Delhi. There are also offices in Dehra Dun and Calcutta, and probably other offices that I do not know of.

There must be many roosts such as I have described, and undoubtedly some have been seen but never reported. Villagers often prove helpful with information on large bird concentrations, but their reports must be verified. Readers with records of this nature will render a great service to Indian ornithology.

Any observers with notes or evidence of large concentrations of migrating birds should be sure to file the information -- with a sketch map -- with the Bombay Natural History Society, which coordinates bird ringing studies in India.

Julian P. Donahue

EXTRACTS FROM SALIM ALI'S NOTE BOOK - 1

We reproduce below verbatim and unedited extracts from Salim Ali's bird 'Ledger'. These notes were the foundation of his THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS, and of his other works.

'Passer domesticus confucius (or indicus?): Burmese House Sparrow
 'I remember I used to shoot sparrows with an air gun as a small boy - somewhere about 1906/7. In the stables at Khetwadi, there were wooden pegs driven in the walls on which harness was hung. One of these pegs had come off and the hole it left, provided a coveted nesting site for sparrows. A pair had occupied this hole, and the hen was sitting inside on the eggs. Just by the entrance, was a nail in the wall which was the favourite perch of the cock when his mate was within. My plan was to approach stealthily from behind the carriages garaged in the stable and "pot" the 'Bull' on guard. A thing that has still stuck in my memory is that I shot 7 or 8 cock-sparrows off this perch in 6 or 7 successive days! The female appeared to have a cock-in-

waiting the whole time, who immediately stepped into the gap of the deceased husband! I have no doubt that the same female took on these consecutive husbands, as I often saw the pair approaching the hole together. The hen went in, while the cock posted himself on the accustomed nail!

'Query: How is it that all these extra males are available? How do they come to know that a vacancy has occurred? How do they decide on the order of succession? What advantage is it to a male to secure a female that has already mated and is committed to family cares?

'24 Sept. '31, Hyderabad (Dec.): Common.

'2 Oct. '31 , " : Observed a cock feeding full-fledged young out of nest. Female parent not in evidence.

'Saifabad, 24.x.'31: Breeding and pair has nest between picture and wall in drawing room. Borgampad (alt. 160') 30.x.31: Specimens No. 197 male imm. W=70 skull soft. Moulting primaries, rectrices and on head, neck, back, etc. No. 198 female ? imm. W=71 skull soft. Moulting as in No. 197. No. 199 male ? imm. W=70.5 skull soft. Moulting primaries, rectrices and on breast etc. All shot out of the same flock in Borgampad village. 1.xi.31. Very common in village. Nelipaka (alt. ca. 160') 13.xi.31 Sp. No. 302 female ad. ov. under. Owner of nest with young in thatch of ceiling (??) Narsampet (ca. 780') 30.xi.31. Spp. No. 395 male (ad.?) (testes 10 mm. long) skull soft. Plumage apparently fresh; rectrices worn at tips. No. 396 female ad. also one full-sized egg in oviduct (soft-shelled) Distinct incubation patch on lower abdomen. Plumage apparently fresh. The pair were observed in copula in a room in the bungalow and were caught immediately after. Noteworthy are the facts that (a) The skull of the male was distinctly soft, therefore he was presumably an imm. bird, although in ad. plumage. (b) The incubation patch on the hen showed that she had just finished rearing one brood or that she was busy brooding and had been at it for a good many days.

'Query: What is the significance of copulation in this stage?

'Saifabad, 27.1.32: Busy nest building all over the house! 28.2.32: For over a month one pair has been busy from morning till night trying to collect grass and rubbish in a corner near the ceiling of the drawing room on the batten covering the electric wires. At the end of the day, a small basketful of rubbish has had to be carried away from underneath the coveted site, the progress in the nest being nil. In spite of this the birds have persisted, and were continuing to persist.'

THE WRYNECK

The Wryneck is a Palaearctic species breeding in Europe, Asia, and Japan, and wintering in the Mediterranean area, North Africa, India and the Indochinese subregion. (Ripley)

The European Wryneck, Jynx torquilla torquilla, is only a winter visitor in West Pakistan, Nepal terai, west and central India, and South India up to Mysore (Salim Ali, 1943, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 43:595). The Japanese Wryneck, Jynx t. chinensis breeds in the zone extending from Baluchistan and NWFP. of Pakistan to Kashmir. It winters in East India and East Pakistan. The winter ranges of the two subspecies have not yet been worked out (Ripley).

During ten years of birdwatching I have seen the Wryneck only about five times. In September 1961, while camping at Bharatpur with the WHO/BNHS group I had the chance of examining a Wryneck caught in the mist net. Its plumage was reminiscent of a Nightjar -- exquisitely mottled and vermiculated above with grey and dark brown; and barred and streaked with dark brown on the buff and white undersurface. It had an uncanny way of twisting its head round.

On October 16, 1961, I heard a peculiar bird call in my garden -- one which was mixture of a woodpecker's and a Common Myna's call! (A Common myna is noted for the variety of its calls.) I spotted a Wryneck on an electric pole just outside the garden. It alighted near our hedge in front of a small mound of earth dug up by small black ants. From its movements I gathered that it was feasting on the ants. As its back was turned towards me I could not see how it ate them. It called once and was answered by another Wryneck about two hundred yards away. It tilted its head listening attentively to determine the location of the other bird and then flew away in the direction of the call.

From late October throughout November I heard it often but saw it only occasionally. In late autumn I thrice saw it basking in the first rays of the sun on a particular high branch of a Salvadora persica tree. It was very silent thereafter and I did not hear its call till April. Between October 16 and April 17, I saw it fifteen times! I watched it on the ground hopping about with its tail held above the ground, on a wall clinging like a woodpecker, high up on a tree behaving like an ordinary passerine.

When the Wryneck first arrived, its plumage was rather dull, but by April it turned beautiful. There seemed to be a difference

in its ways too. It was quite shy and wary in October but by the middle of April it appeared to be unusually bold or perhaps careless. From the 14th till 17th April it was found every morning and evening on a low brick wall in my back garden. This wall had cracks and holes and small black ants were swarming over it. The Wryneck always first alighted on a Moringa (Drumstick) tree near the wall, watched out for a while, descended at the base of the wall and then worked its way up clinging to the wall like a woodpecker - with two toes forward and two backward.

On the first occasion that it came for its breakfast of ants, I was working in my back garden hardly twelve feet away, and I cautiously drew back till I was far enough to get it in focus of my binoculars! Clinging to the wall with its barred tail slightly spread out, it was putting its bill into a hole, then suddenly it turned its bill away from the hole to flick off an ant from the wall with a lightning swipe of his long mauve-pink sticky tongue! There was probably a great concentration of ants, larva and pupa within the hole and the unfortunate ants that came within its range on the wall were flicked off one after another. It was uncanny to watch a bird use its tongue like a chameleon! Seventeenth of April was the last date on which I saw it, which incidentally is a record for Delhi.

I am curious to know whether my Wryneck was a visitor from Europe or spent its summer in Kashmir (J. t. chinensis?). My visitor seemed to differ slightly from the pictures in Peterson's FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE, and Lowther & Bates's BREEDING BIRDS OF KASHMIR. The three slight differences were as follows:

1) The chin was white barred black. Stuart Baker (FAUNA, vol. 4:99) describes the European bird as having a pale rufous chin barred with black (though Peterson has the chin white).

2) A dark brown line of uniform width starting from the bill through the eye reached as far as the nape. And a whitish supercilium started behind the eye. In Peterson's book this brown line is much wider behind the eye. The Japanese Wryneck in the BREEDING BIRDS OF KASHMIR is shown with a buff supercilium barred with black.

3) The two dark brown lines on either side of the back along the inner edge of the wings extended to the tip of the wings, whereas they are shown only half way down the back in the Japanese bird.

These are perhaps insignificant details, but I should be grate-

ful for a description of the main differences between the two subspecies. Is it possible to get a description of the subspecies Jynx torquilla himalayana?

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

WOODPECKERS NESTING IN OLD NEST-TUNNELS

My impression that woodpeckers invariably made new nests had to be modified this year. A pair of Southern Godlenback Woodpeckers decided to use a nest that had been made by a pair of Green Barbets in 1961.

In February (1962) a Goldenbacked Woodpecker used to go about inspecting dry branches, looking into old holes and making desultory attempts to enlarge a hollow which woodpeckers had just started and given up last year. In the course of this prospecting it was also found looking into, and even entering, the nest where, I presume, it had raised young last year.

On the 16th of March the woodpecker was heard drumming repeatedly on a dry mango branch. In this branch was a tunnel which Green Barbets had nested in last year. The woodpecker drummed just under the entrance hole as well as at a spot opposite to, and about 3 feet below, the hole. From the 16th of March to about the 20th of April my wife heard the bird drumming on the branch. (I was away except during Easter and the week-ends.) Early in April the bird and its mate began to show great interest in the tunnel. At first only one bird took any interest in the nest. It put its head in, brought out something and rubbed it into the feathers of its breast and back. Later on both birds worked inside, taking turns. The entrance was not enlarged or its shape altered to any appreciable extent.

On the 19th and 20th of April I saw the female sitting inside with its face and bill alone showing. For long periods it just sat like that and I thought that the bird was sitting on eggs. Once I saw the male relieving it. (It may be noted that on the 17th a ratsnake had been seen on this branch. Last year, when Barbets nested in the tunnel a ratsnake carried away all but one of the young barbets when they were about to leave the nest.)

On 25th April a pair of Common Mynas arrived and drove away the woodpeckers. Though one of the woodpeckers was seen on the same tree later, it never came near the barbet's nest. The mynas, too, came only three or four times every day, just to show that the hole was now theirs.

Last year a pair of Mynas began to pester a pair of woodpeckers (Southern Goldenbacked) weeks before the young woodpeckers left the nest, but the woodpeckers managed to hold the fort. Only after the young woodpeckers had left the nest could the Mynas take over.

Why dont woodpeckers use their bills effectively when they have to face such enemies?

The woodpeckers evicted by the mynas this year have started a new tunnel on a stump 25 yards away.

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan

RETURN MIGRATION OF ROSY PASTORS AND WAGTAILS

Large numbers of Rosy Pastors were at Jasdan in the first half of April. About 300 were seen on 4.4.62, 150 on 18.4.62, 100 on 21.4.62, 50 on 22.4.62, and 15 on 29.4.62. None were seen after this.

Wagtails were in large numbers in the latter part of March and in some numbers in the first week of April. The numbers rapidly declined after this and the last wagtail (Motacilla alba) was seen on 22.4.62. It is interesting to note that Lavkumar saw swarms of Yellow Wagtails at Okhla near Delhi on 25.4.62.

If more readers of our News Letter would send us information about the return migration of Rosy Pastors and Wagtails, we would get an idea of the northward movement of these birds. With readers scattered all over India there is no reason why we should not get complete information about the arrivals and departures of our migratory birds.

Y.S. Shivraj Kumar of Jasdan.

WADERS BREEDING IN BHAVNAGAR, N. GUJARAT

On 5 May while out rowing in the Gaurishanker Lake in Bhavnagar I noted a colony of Blackwinged Stilts on a small islet. When I went closer, I saw the Small Indian Pratincole, pretending a broken wing. I found two nests, both having a clutch of two eggs. I noticed that one pair of eggs were bluish green speckled with brown, while the other pair were buff speckled with brown. There is no mention of these birds breeding in Saurashtra. Last year I found the Ternlet breeding on a similar island. This was also a new find. Two nests of the Kentish Plover were found, when my uncle and I searched for more nests. This may be the first record of this Plover breeding on a freshwater lake. The Large Stone Curlew, River, and Blackbellied terns and the

Redwattled Lapwings were found breeding also. Watching and filming these birds was very interesting.

Y.S. Shivbhadrasinhji
of Bhavnagar

BIRDS OF COCHIN AND ERNAKULAM

Reference p. 6 of Newsletter for May 1961, p. 9 of September 1961, and pp.6-7 of November 1961.

While at Ernakulam recently for a month (25.3.62 to 24.4.62) I tried to gather a few more details. Except, however, for a single visit to Vypeen Island, birdwatching was a casual affair. During the last week of March the following were noted:

1. A Brown Shrike in park near the backwaters
 2. Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher - song heard in different parts of town fairly regularly. Saw only once.
 3. Some species of Reed Warbler (sparrow size; check notes)
 4. Green Barbet one of the commonest birds here. Now feeding young in nests. Jambool fruit very popular.
 5. Tickell's Flowerpecker seen feeding fully-fledged young
 6. Pair of Black Drongos for the first time in Maharaja's College area
 7. Magpie Robins feeding young
 8. Jungle Myna pair beginning nest. (How did this numerous species escape Capt. Tyabji's notice?)
 9. House Crows nesting
 10. Owl (Mottled Wood?) heard uttering gloom and hoo-ha-haa calls.
- Willow Warbler heard for the last time on 4 April.

Vypeen Island, 4 April 1962, 5.30 to 6.30 p.m.: Inhabited part poor in birds. Only House Crows and Pond Herons and, overhead, House Swifts. Plovers (sp.), Gulls (sp.), and Terns (sp.) also passing over. In marshy area hundreds of gulls. Those seen at close quarters appeared to be Brownheaded Gulls. About 50% of the gulls had black heads; the rest had white heads with 'ear-mark'. A few large terns, impossible to identify. Common and Spotted Sandpipers. Pond Herons. A few swallows (Common Swallow?). In the prickly marsh plant which fills the marsh, Ashy Wren-Warblers numerous. A few Egrets (sp.) and an all-grey heron (Reef Heron?). Owing to the nature of the ground close approach was impossible. In December and January the marshy areas should prove more rewarding.

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan

REVIEW

KEY TO THE NAMES OF BRITISH BIRDS. By R.D. Macleod. pp. 62. Pitman, London. 1954. Price 10s 6d.

There comes a period for every amateur birdwatcher when he finds that he cannot get any further without learning all the scientific names of birds. For those who do not know Latin these names are incomprehensible, long and difficult to pronounce, and all but impossible to memorize. This small and fascinating book is a kind of dictionary of bird names -- both the Latin names as well as the common names.

In a very fine Introduction Mr. Macleod explains the rules and common usage regarding scientific names. In the main text he gives the meaning, derivation, and history of all the Latin words which occur in these names. The formidable three-storied names are thus reduced to logic and comprehensibility. The generic name for flycatchers, for instance, is Muscicapa, which, as one can guess, is the exact translation of its common name. And who could fail to remember that the curlew is Numenius once it is explained that the word describes a new moon which is supposed to be the shape of the curlew's bill?

Although the book claims to be a key to the names of British birds it is likely to be nearly as useful in India. When I looked up the name of our familiar friend the Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata) I found that saxicolos meant 'stone-dweller' (saxum- stone colo- inhabit), and fulicata meant 'black' (fuligo- sooty). Compared to the poetic description 'sooty stone-dweller' it is the common name of the Indian Robin which sounds dull and prosaic. Ten and sixpence is a very small price to pay for being able to make oneself familiar with the scientific names of birds with enjoyment.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Ornithology has so far not been too popular a subject with university students in our country. For one thing no facilities for study have been available except in a very few institutions. This shortcoming will, we hope, be made good as quickly as our resources permit. Meanwhile it is heartening to note that the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research are encouraging Field Ornithology by giving stipends for post-graduate work. A recent notification from the Bombay Natural History Society is reproduced below:

..... 12

'BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

. Field Ornithology

Applications are invited for TWO post-graduate researchers for a field project sponsored by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, under the guidance of Dr. Salim Ali.

Candidates should possess a First (or high Second) Class B.Sc. degree of a recognized university, one with Zoology as principal and Botany subsidiary; the other vice versa. Field experience will be an added qualification. The work will entitle them to submit a thesis for the M.Sc. degree of Bombay University.

Selected candidates will receive a stipend of Rs150/- per month for the first year, with a likelihood of its continuance during the second.

Applications with full particulars must reach the undersigned by 15 June 1962.

Sd/-

Honorary Secretary, BNHS
91-Walkeshwar Road, Bombay-6.

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Shri R.S. Prasad has raised some queries with regard to differentiation of sexes of the babblers in Shri Janakiraman's paper 'Love's Labour Lost' in Newsletter 2(2):4-5. We have to point out that as explained by Mr. Janakiraman the differentiation of the sexes was only presumed, and now it would be necessary to make similar observations on marked and identified birds in order to get confirmation. Without dissection the sexes can perhaps only be determined if the birds are seen in the act of mating. This depends largely on luck and opportunity.

CORRESPONDENCE

Morning Song of Birds

It may interest readers of the Newsletter to know the sequence of time when birds commence singing in the mornings or, to use the language of Islamic scholars - when birds commence their adoration to God, the Exalted, the Almighty.

April 2, 1962

5.55 hrs. : Koel
6.00 " : Jungle Crows (orchestra!)
6.10 " : Kingfisher

..... 13

6.13 hrs.	:	Redwhiskered Bulbul
6.13 "	:	Dhayal
6.15 "	:	Pond Heron (<u>koh</u> , <u>koh</u>)
6.17 "	:	Crow-Pheasant
6.25 "	:	Unidentified (<u>Tooi</u> , <u>tooi</u> , <u>tooi</u>)
6.25 "	:	Unidentified
6.27 "	:	Tailor Bird
6.30 "	:	Coppersmith
6.30 "	:	Flower Pecker
6.45 "	:	Dove

The timing are by a Lougines & Jeel wrist watch. Variation: 1 minute a fortnight. The timings were about the same on April 1 and 3.

A.A.A. Fyzee
Kihim, Kolaba District, Bombay

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Food & Song of Birds

It was very interesting to read the two notes in the Newsletter of May 1962, the first note about the feeding habit of birds on skinks by Mrs. Usha Ganguli and the second about the early and late bird calls of the day by Shri K.K. Neelakantan. I wish to give my experiences as follows:

About the red tail of the skink, the family Skincidae has 18 genera with about 100 species, and the majority of them have red tails in the young stage. This becomes normal coloured in the adult stage. I have seen the Magpie Robin feeding on skinks in the same manner by passing the prey through the bill two or three times and then swallowing it head first. Domestic fowls feed on skinks and geckos by killing the prey by two or three strokes of their strong bills and then dealing it in the above manner.

In my experience the earliest bird which calls is the Farm Cock punctually between 4.15 and 4.30 a.m. As regards calls of crows they call practically every night irrespective of season, or the fact there is moonlight or not.

P.W. Soman

Zafar Futehally,
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NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOLUME 2-1962



NESTING BEHAVIOUR OF THE BLACK DRONGO,
DICRURUS MACROCERCUS

How do birds spend their time when the nest is almost complete? To satisfy this curiosity I kept under observation a pair of Black Drongos (Dicrurus macrocercus) which had a nest about 40 feet above ground in the fork of a branch of teak tree. The nest was nearly complete.

The system of stratified random sampling was adopted. The day was split into two strata: 0500-1200 and 1200-1900. An hour (60 minutes) was selected as the sampling unit and chosen at random in the two strata.

The sex was determined during courting. The fork of the female's tail was slightly bedraggled. Observations lasted for five days and came to an abrupt end on April 30, 1954, when the nest was blown off by a Nor'wester leaving some fragments hanging. The storm came just as I had completed my afternoon observations. The pair thereafter abandoned the site.

O b s e r v a t i o n s

April 26, 1954, Units: 0500-0600, and 1400-1500

0500: Female sitting on the nest - male on the lower branch - female flies off - male on the nest.

0505: Female comes back - male goes off - male comes back - female on the ground, then on the fence - male on the ground then on the fence - female flies away.

.....
 0515: Male catches an insect and sits on the fence - does not notice two Common Mynas sitting close to the nest - female drives away one of the Mynas - a few mynas again - now male is driving them away with snatching noise - female on nest - male away.

.....
 0550: She on nest - hawks an insect, flies away and returns to nest - she leaves nest, sits on branch and then on fence.

.....
 0600: Female flies away from there too - nest unattended - male

absent till now.

Weather: Cool morning with a light breeze.

Afternoon:

1400: Female sitting on nest - male nowhere to be seen - female sits with her bill wide open due to heat - she flies off to the jamun tree - male suddenly appears and takes her place on nest - now sits on branch near nest.

1405: Male on nest - female goes to a mango tree about 50 yards away.

.....
1415: Male flies away, nest unattended - male returns and chases away a Crimsonbreasted Barbet - calls twice and then sits silently on branch - spots a crow and gives him hell - back on branch - a Crimsonbreasted Barbet comes and is chased away with a snatching noise - flies away to jamun tree.

.....
1430: Female still on nest - calls four times - male replies - not on nest now but near it - again calls and whistles - no response from the other end.

1435: Female calls at intervals - goes to jamun tree - calls furiously when another Drongo approaches nesting tree - sits on topmost branch and calls.

April 27, 1954, Units: 0600-0700 and 1800-1900

0610: Female still close to nest - drives away another Drongo and Crimsonbreasted Barbet with loud noise - pair joins fight with another Drongo - male on fence - female on branch and flies away - male on ground - back to branch - now near nest preening - she on nearby gamhar tree.

0615: Male in same position - female on nearby teak - female drives away a crow who was far from nesting tree - male flies away - female on nesting branch - drives away a Crimsonbreasted Barbet.

.....
April 28, 1954, Units: 1100-1200, and 1500-1600

.....
1145: She still on nest - calls twice jerking her wings - male back after hearing call - she spreads her wing to protect nest - male flies to nearby peepal - female puffs her back feathers - male takes her place - she flies away.

1150: He still on nest; flat upon it, only tail and top of head visible - mimics Merlin when he sees female sitting on the lower branch.

1155: Male on nest - female replaces him - he attacks a Pariah Kite with a furious call - now on branch - then flies away to amaltas - she gives signal on seeing a kite - male immediately gives chase.

.....
Weather: Warm, clear and stuffy.

April 29, 1954, Units: 0600-0700, and 1200-1300

.....
0645: Both back, calling to each other - both chase another Drongo - female returns to nest - male continues pursuit - a pair of Drongos arrive - fight joined with furious calls on nearby teak, wings and tail vibrating - both back on nesting tree after driving away intruders - female attacks a crow but the crow stays put - she pecks at him furiously - crow runs away. Male flies away.

.....
1250: Female chases a crow on the ground near nesting tree - flies to well curb and drinks water with two Common Mynas - back on nest - male returns and takes her place - she flies away, calling chew-chew, in a low voice while leaving nest - male utters warning note and drives away Merlin - back on nest.

.....
Weather: Hot day, with a struggle between clouds and sun; occasional gusts of wind.

April 30, 1954, Units: 0800-0900 and 1500-1600

.....
0820: Both on nesting tree - male flies to electric wire then on to fence, hawking - female starts calling, male takes the cue - both silent - female again calls twice but no response from the other end - she flies to peepal tree then back - she mimics Merlin - gives alarm on seeing kite - she drives away crow on peepal tree -back.

.....
0840: Female on same branch - drives away two Common Mynas approaching - male returns - both call with vibrating wings - both silent - female flies away - male takes a speedy flight on spotting a kite and returns to tree - female returns - both chase a kite and then a crow - both back on tree calling together - both go after an insect - both return.

.....
Weather: Clear and sunny day. Though a strong wind is blowing, yet cool and pleasant.

Afternoon

.....
1600: Male flies to jamun tree - female still on teak - male comes to nest, with an insect and eats it standing on the edge.

Weather: Hot and clear day, with light clouds and a strong wind.

A n a l y s i s

It is quite obvious that the sampling was not intensive enough. Probably three strata, 0500-1000, 1000-1500, and 1500-1900, would have yielded better results. Similarly two sampling units of half an hour in each stratum would be more advisable. Therefore the conclusions given here have to be treated as indication only, to be confirmed by subsequent observations.

The sampling units covered the periods from 0500-0900, 1100-130 and 1400-1900. From 0500-0600 presumably because it is not light enough to feed, the nest receives attention. In this interval the nest is attended to for 36 minutes, is left unattended for 19 minutes, and unguarded for 5 minutes. Between 0600-0900 the maximum attention is to feeding. The nest is looked after for 10-2/3 minutes, unattended for 46 minutes, and unguarded 3-1/3 minutes. From 1100-1600 the nest reigns supreme, commanding care for 50 1/2 minutes, is unattended for 8 1/4 minutes, and unguarded for 1 1/4 minutes. 1600-1900 is like the morning. The nest is visited for 15 minutes only, in fleeting visits and the absence is for 45 minutes.

The female looks after the nest more frequently than the male. During the five days she visited the nest 31 times, spending a total of 197 minutes over it, as against 15 by the male for a period of 73 minutes only. Since the sampling units covered only 2 hours out of the 14, for the full five days the figures will be: female, 241 visits for 1532 minutes; male, 116 visits for 560 minutes.

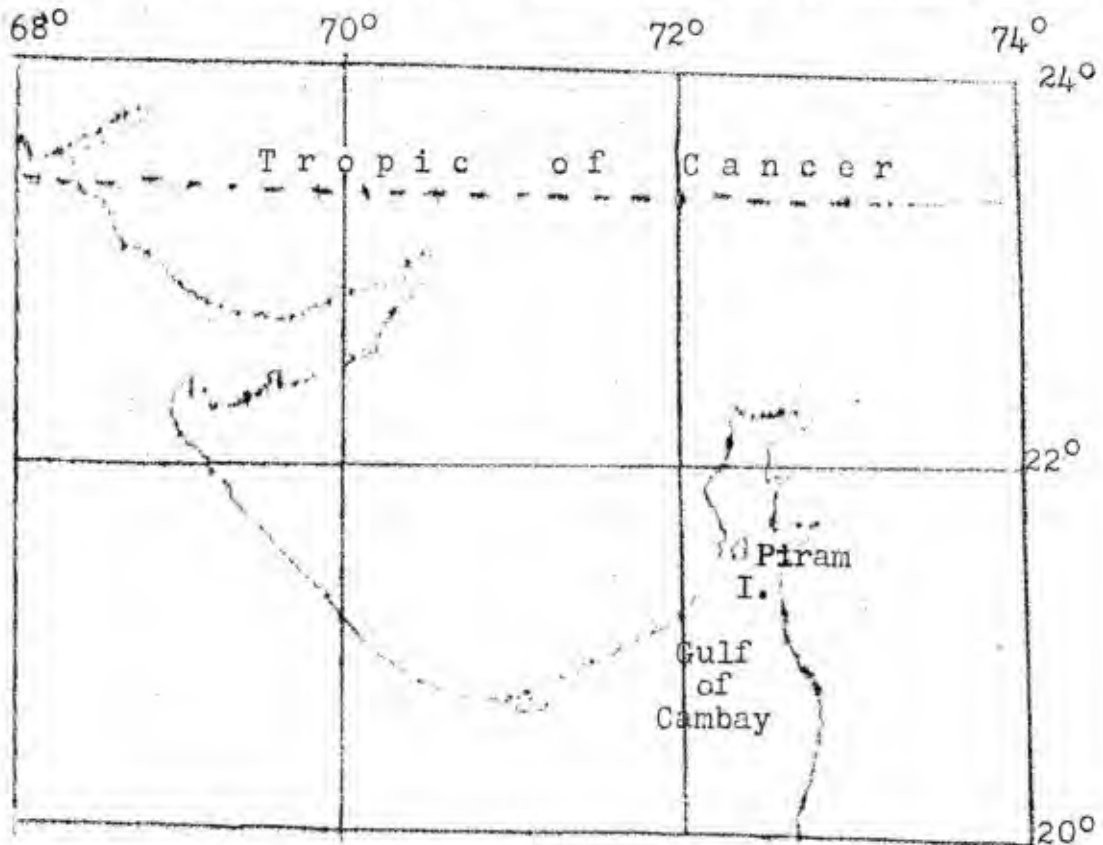
All trees, wires, fences, well, etc. named are close to the nest, all within a radius of about 50 yards. Whenever the birds went to sit on the nest, they called chewn-chewn softly in a low key.

(Mrs.) Jamal Ara

PIRAM ISLAND VISITED

M.K.S. Dharmakumarsinhji arranged a trip to Piram Island on 22 May 1962. This island is situated about 3 1/2 miles off the Saurashtra coast in the Gulf of Cambay. It is about a mile and a half long and varies in breadth from a furlong to half a mile. The island is covered with sand dunes which form miniature hills and ravines. There are a couple of small marshes which hold water during the monsoon. A patch of about 60 acres of cultivation is on the southwestern side of the island. Two wells provide water for drinking for the cultivators family and the light house keepers. The gullies in the dunes and the flat ground are

covered with a dense growth of babool and other scrub. This would be worth investigating in the autumn with a view to net migrants which should pass through here on their way to the Gujarat coast which is visible from the island. The estuary of the Narbada is opposite the island. The tides in the Gulf of Cambay are high, 39 ft. at Bhavnagar Port. Wide expanses of



Map showing position of Piram Island

mudflats and reefs are exposed at low tide around the island and there are both sandy and shingly beaches. During the winter hordes of migrant waders are seen on these flats.

Due to the courtesy of Shri Virkar, the Port Officer, Shri Fadra Chief Pilot Officer, and his assistant Shri Patel, we were able to accompany them in the port launch to the island. We started from the old Bhavnagar Port in the early morning with the ebb tide. Reef Herons in both the white as well as the grey colour phases were on the mud banks. A few Gullbilled Terns flew over. As we got out of the creek and approached the new port we saw a flock of Lesser Flamingoes in bright plumage on the shore. Suddenly we saw a white plover fly towards us and as it came closer we recognized it to be the Crab Plover. This was the third record for the bird from Saurashtra. On the other side of the Gulf 150 birds were seen once near the mouth of the Narbada.

Some flocks of waders flew past too far for positive identification. Near Gogha the Crab Plover was seen returning back and high hopes of seeing it on Piram Island were raised. Some Caspian Terns approached our launch and soon we were near Piram Island. We got into a small dinghy and landed on the sandy beach. Bluecheeked Bee-eaters flew overhead and no doubt they would breed in the sand cliffs as they do in the nearby cliffs of the Saurashtra coast in hundreds. In fact later on we saw some of their burrows in a sand cliff. Curlew were in solos on the mudflats and flocks of Large Sand Plover in full breeding plumage fed and fought amongst each other at the waters edge. Bright plumaged Turnstones flew about in small flocks overhead.

We walked on to a shingly headland which was only covered by the waves during the monsoon storms. We saw an Indian Courser. We watched the bird as eggs were suspected, and very soon we saw the bird sit down and incubate. We noted the spot carefully and approached slowly. The bird went off the eggs giving neither an alarm nor doing the broken wing trick when we were at a distance from the eggs, so beloved of other waders such as the Kentish Plover -- in fact the Gujarati name of the Kentish Plover is dhongili titodi (dhong meaning pretence or deception in Gujarati). In spite of the careful approach I nearly stepped onto the eggs, they were so beautifully camouflaged in the sand. The eggs were dark coloured and there were no bold spots to make them stand out against the black and yellow sand. There was no suggestion of a nest or scrape even. A Great Stone Plover showed anxiety and possibly had young near by. However, time was short and we had to explore as much of the island as possible, so we moved on. Redwattled, and Yellow-wattled Lapwings by their behaviour made us suspect eggs or young, and it seems to have been a good time for breeding birds. As we moved on we saw a number of peafowl and they are common on the island. A Little Brown Dove fluttered off its nest only 1½ ft. from the ground. It fluttered along the path and I thought it was doing the broken wing trick, but not having seen this dove do this before, followed it up and found it had a damaged wing and could not fly more than a few feet. There are few predators on the island except for snakes and crows. The Lighthouse Keeper reported seeing two white snakes. A Rain Quail flew up and away and a Bustard Quail flew past and settled under a babool. There are no partridges on the island. Crows, both Jungle and Common House are very common and no doubt a serious menace to birds nesting on the island. There are two palms on the island and sure enough a pair of Palm Swifts are in them. A Brahminy Kite has a nest in one palm. The lighthouse keeper informed us they nested there every year and that the young were 'left on the mainland by the parents every year'. House Sparrows were abundant and Whitethroated Munias were in the scrub jungle.

After our long walk in the hot sun it was refreshing to sit in the shade of the lighthouse and enjoy the cool sea breeze, a few hours relief from the heat wave searing the Gujarat State. All too soon the tide started coming in and we left to go back to the launch. On our way in a grove of trees along the path we saw a Brown Flycatcher (Muscicapa latirostris), the first record of this bird for Saurashtra. As we got to the beach two pairs and a solo, of that prince among waders, the Oystercatcher in full livery were seen.

While we did not find any new birds nesting on the island there certainly are some places there where some shore or sea birds may nest, and the island is worth investigating in June. The seas are very rough at that time and it will be a problem to get there. On getting home we read in The Times of India about an island in the Laccadives covered with nesting birds. I dreamt of Crab Plover, Oystercatchers, Sandwich Terns, and Curlew nesting on Piram.

Y. S. Shivraj Kumar

RINGING MIGRATORY WAGTAILS IN KERALA

I had the good fortune of being present at Edanad from 28 March to 8 April, where yellow wagtails (see Newsletter Vol. 2, No.4: 4-9) -- races baema and thunbergi of the Motacilla flava group, and the species M. indica -- were being netted at night roosts, examined for ticks, and ringed, under the Bird Migration Study Project conducted by Dr. Salim Ali.

The Country we camped, and worked in

The name Edanad is a combination of two Malayalam words, 'Eda' meaning 'in-between', and 'nad' meaning 'land'. The land owes its name to the action of the Pamba River which bifurcates north of the place, and the two arms join together further on, enclosing Edanad in the form of an island. A zone of compounds surrounding residential houses covers the centre of the island lengthwise; the rest of it is under sugarcane. To the west of the island about 30 miles away and bordering the Vembanad Lake lie the inundated fields of Kuttanad, with extensive paddy cultivation, and sugarcane in the elevated parts.

A hearsay History of Wagtail Roosts of Edanad, and a probable basis for it

The farmers consider the roosting wagtails as a pest, for they allegedly destroy the fodder value of sugarcane leaves by their droppings. Talks with the local farming population revealed that the roosting of wagtails on the island first began only

three or four years ago. Before that there were apparently no wagtail roosts in Edanad. This information seemed rather strange; so I cross-examined the farmers further. It seems that before three or four years ago the sugarcane grown in Edanad was of the Always variety which is used in the jaggery industry. There was no demand for this variety from the sugar factories since its crushing is uneconomical. To supply the sugar factories the Edanad growers switched on to raising Java, and 449 or Nellicoppa varieties of sugarcane. Only after this did the wagtails start roosting in the Edanad sugarcane plantations. These two varieties take about a year to reach maturity and in March-April when I was in Edanad, the Java variety was being harvested. The fields were again being replanted by the same variety. 449 or Nellicoppa variety was 3 to 4 feet in height at this time, and according to the farmers would be ready for harvesting from September to December. All our netting at this season was restricted to patches of the Java variety which the wagtails roosted in, never even attempting to settle in the young 449 or Nellicoppa plants when disturbed. It, therefore, appears that these two varieties of sugarcane crops jointly supply the wagtails with roosting facilities in Edanad from about September to April, i.e. throughout their winter stay in this part of India. The sugarcane varieties now grown in Edanad encourage the wagtails to roost on the island. They are said to arrive in Edanad after the monsoons have stopped, i.e. somewhere in the middle of October or beginning of November. The inundated fields of Kuttanad provide them with a benevolent feeding ground. As recorded by Mr. P.V. George, I also saw them feeding in vast numbers in the Kuttanad paddylands, and flying in to roost in the direction of Edanad. Besides wagtails the roosts of Edanad were also being used by a small number of munias, and a negligible number of reed warblers.

How the Wagtails arrived and occupied the roosts

The roosting of wagtails was more orderly than that of the munias roosting in the same patches of sugarcane. The munias were observed to fly in, in small batches of 15 or 20 birds (sometimes mixed with the flocks of wagtails), and with a little flying about over the roost would settle on the foliage of the cane for the night's repose. In contrast to this a cooperative behaviour prior to settling down for the night was observed in the wagtails. Either a solo, or a brace of wagtails, would come and keep flying over the roost, weesping characteristically as it did so. This would go on for some time, when the birds would be joined by others in batches of 5 to 12, all circling over the roost. This circling perhaps acted as a signal for others of the congregation to make for this spot. Soon swarms of wagtails would pour in from the west, and fly about high over the roost. As the numbers of circling wagtails increased, dropping-in commenced. A certain orderly pattern of dropping-in always seemed

to be kept up (except on 31st March). In the fields we worked, the first dropping-in commenced in the northernmost patch of the roosting belt. When the circling flocks found the patch filled to its capacity, they would start dropping-in into the patch next to it and so on, the southernmost portion being occupied last.

Unlike the European Swallows netted recently at Mahim in Bombay, which had two methods of occupying the roost -- one of dropping-in from above and the other of streaming in more or less horizontally from the northern end of the roost -- the wagtails in Edanad only dropped in from above. They always did so about the centre of the roosting patch, at an angle of about 45 degrees, and then dispersed in various directions when near the top of the sugarcane. I also had opportunities of observing them while leaving the roost in the mornings; they then took off at an angle of about 10 degrees.

The time of arrival of the first wagtail above the roost was daily recorded, as also the duration of dropping-in. It showed that the wagtails had no set time to arrive before sunset at the roost, or to commence the dropping-in. The dropping-in, however, continued for a quarter of an hour after sunset, but was completed before it got dark. The time taken for dropping-in was: 27, ?, 47, 41, 25, 16, 18, 14, 7, and 4 minutes respectively for each evening from 29 March to 7 April. The sudden upward fluctuation of 47 minutes on 31 March perhaps indicated that more wagtails had concentrated at the roost from surrounding areas before emigration. From the progressive shortening of the dropping-in time thereafter, combined with the lessening of numbers, it was evident that exodus was in progress.

How the netting was done

All netting during my stay at camp was confined to the evenings when the birds came in to roost. The nets were planted on the outer borders of the sugarcane patches and hoisted up to the topmost possible limits of the poles to get the best results. They thus stood about 2 to 2½ feet above the tops of the sugarcane. The roost had to be disturbed more or less when the wagtails had settled down, and the birds were scared into the nets. It suggests to me that raising of the nets to 5 or 6 feet above the tops of the cane would help in catching the birds as they take off in the mornings also. This would give us the advantage of carrying on the work during day time.

R e c a p t u r e s

The recaptures showed a progressively upward trend as the roost was becoming depopulated. 18 ringed wagtails were recaptured

..... 10

between 29 March and 6 April, whereas the total recaptures for the entire period the camp was in operation (21 days) were 21. A large proportion of the wagtails caught towards the close of the camp, including some of the recaptures, were in more or less heavy moult, and difficult to identify racially. This also suggested that emigration was in progress, and that wagtails which had completed their moult were vacating the place.

Possible new Roosting Grounds

In order to prospect similar areas elsewhere for extension of the work, I looked at the crop maps of India in the SCHOOL ATLAS, 1st ed. (1961). The sugarcane growing areas are shown as 80,000 hectares in Maharashtra State, 16,000 in Gujarat, 16,000 in Rajasthan, and 32,000 in Andhra Pradesh. In the Mysore State the acreage is 32,000 hectares, 16,000 of these just south of the Maharashtra State. There are also extensive areas under sugarcane in the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Orissa. Readers of the Newsletter residing in these States will be able to collect valuable information about migratory birds roosting in these plantations. A visit either before sunrise or half an hour before sunset will disclose the migrants using such roosts. The timings of visits are important, for outside the morning and evening flights from and to the roost one will not be able to see the birds. This information will immensely help the Bird Migration Study Project in locating the field camps. Knowledge of the variety of sugarcane raised is also important, for as far as our experience goes (at least in Kerala) wagtails only use the Java variety.

Finding of a Swallow Roost at Vembanad, Kerala

A trip to the Vembanad Lake on 30 March resulted in the finding of a Hirundo rustica roost in a large patch of saccharum grass. This patch juts into the lake like a peninsula, and swallows were seen to converge on the roost from all around. Slow flying individual swallows along the reedy dykes of fields bordering the Vembanad Lake first made us suspect that they might be assembling for roosting, and an hour's cruise up and down the lake brought us to this roost. We could not ring since rings of the size were completely exhausted, and fresh supplies could not be released in time from the Bombay Customs owing to certain formalities. Thus an excellent opportunity was lost.

Rev. A. Krebs, and his Services to Edanad Camp

Rev. A. Krebs of Ulanderpet, S. Arcot District, was with the Edanad camp for about a fortnight. He not only helped us in the day to day work of the camp, but also won for us the support of the Christian farmers. He preached in the two churches

of Edanad drawing biblical references to birds, and told the faithful of the role they play in the economy of man, contrasting facts with popular fallacies. He told his audiences about bird migration, how bird banding helps in its study, and why birds are suspected of carrying and spreading viruses harmful to man. These talks helped in dispelling the Christian farmers' notions that the wagtails and members of the Bird Migration Study team were a pest to their sugarcane.

J.S. Serrao

REVIEW

BIRD DOCTOR. By Katharine Tottenham. 1961. Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd. pp. 160. Price 15s.

Many of us have tried our hand at a spot of bird doctoring in our day - the bird with a broken wing or leg, the nestlings to be reared by hand. And even where there is no attempt beyond giving a bird rest and shelter, the overwhelming problem of feeding it properly seems to become insurmountable. In the first place one must know accurately what sort of food a bird will take; in the second one must be able and willing to obtain the right sort of worm or fly; and thirdly, one must be able to serve it to the bird in a tempting and persuasive manner.

Katharine Tottenham taught herself by endless experiments to do this; her house is now like a well-run restaurant where almost any species of bird can be served at a moment's notice.

By trial and experimentation, again, she has evolved a very successful treatment for sea birds crippled by floundering in oily waters; for wounds and for broken legs and wings. The amazing thing, for the Indian reader, is the heartbreaking amount of trouble she takes over each patient together with her complete lack of wooly sentimentality. When a bird is really beyond hope, she does the kindest thing, which is to kill it with a tap at the base of its skull. About a Guillemot which she had rescued from an oily shore and nursed for months, and which suddenly died one day of an overstrained heart, her only comment is that it taught her a sharp lesson. Birds which have been ill must be forced to have a longer convalescence than one thinks.

This remarkable book by a very remarkable woman deserves to be read as a pleasant and stimulating piece of writing; at the same time it must be carefully studied and made use of by bird lovers who have the chance to rescue and save hurt and damaged birds

(Mrs.) Laeeq Futehally

NOTES AND COMMENTS

In Newsletter for June we published extracts from Salim Ali's note book on sparrows, and in this issue we have notes by Mrs. Jamal Ara on the nesting behaviour of the Black Drongo. These notes should indicate to our readers the importance of keeping data methodically and over long periods at a time. Notes kept sporadically, though interesting are not of much value. Our knowledge of bird ecology is so limited that it would be a service to ornithology if each one of us selected a particular bird for continuous work while enjoying the general panorama around us. The system of sampling employed by Mrs. Ara could lead to interesting results. 'Random sampling' is better than 'random watching', and we would like to hear from our readers which particular birds they intend watching intensively during 1962.

CORRESPONDENCE

Civilization & Wildlife

Mr. Beatty (Newsletter for May 1962) rightly mentions the apparent 'scarcity of birdlife in India'. I agree with him that whereas the spread of civilization has been a gradual process over a very long period, the reduction of wildlife has assumed an alarming proportion only in the last two decades or so. I would however like to qualify this observation with the following points: (1) We have become increasingly conscious of our animals and birds during the present generation, and the reduction in their numbers in the past century has been unnoticed by us. (2) During the last century or so, the improvement in fire-arms and transportation have greatly helped in the destruction of wildlife. (3) More and more people are now interested in shooting than ever before. (4) After Independence, there has been a considerable loosening up in game law enforcement, and this has resulted in widespread and wanton killing. Even people who should know better are only too ready to disregard the traditional and chivalrous rules of shikar. (5) Non game and game species have of late been depleted in numbers because of the removal of vegetation cover in the form of forests, grass and scrub, and hedges. In large areas the introduction of low growing commercial crops like groundnuts in place of stands of tall millets has further exposed nesting birds to predation.

All these factors and not any inhibiting climatic control have in the last few years greatly affected our birdlife. Wherever a judicious control of vegetation has been effected as in the expanding tentacles of New Delhi, birds have found a place in man's world, and rather than have decreased, many species have increased, and birdwatching in and around Delhi is a very rewarding pastime next to the very pulse of a great capital.

K.S. Lavkumar, Jasdan.

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NEW LETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOLUME 2-1962



NEWSLETTER

FOR

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SPEED OF FLIGHT OF BIRDS

Very few observations appear to have been made on the speed of flight of Indian birds.

Stuart Baker timed the Needletailed Swifts passing over his bungalow in Assam to a ridge two miles away, and calculated that they were flying at 200 miles per hour. The Alpine Swift is supposed to be able to fly at speeds ranging from 80 to 150 and even 200 m.p.h. Two Golden Orioles were observed by Acharya, from a car, flying at 25 m.p.h. While riding a motor cycle, Acharya also observed the Large Pied Wagtail flying at 25 m.p.h. Huxson found the Green Parakeet flying at 30 m.p.h. or more as judged from a car.

Stuart Baker's claim for the Needletailed Swift has been questioned on the ground that he might have lost sight of the birds against the background of the hills before they had covered the full distance. The very high speeds which the Alpine Swift is said to be capable of are probably not based on careful measurements.

Birds may be considered to have two speeds, one being the normal or economic rate for everyday purposes and the other an accelerated speed for escape or pursuit of prey. The normal speed for general movement is also used for migration except by the smaller birds who accelerate their migration velocities possibly because of their vulnerability.

Hunting and escaping speeds are not easy to determine because they are used only for brief periods and at irregular times. The ordinary flying speeds can often be determined with reasonable accuracy.

The difference between the ground speed and the air speed of a flying bird should also be recognized. The actual speed in relation to the ground will depend on the force and direction of the wind to which the bird is subject. An example will make this clear. A bird with an air speed of 40 m.p.h. flying with a 25 m.p.h. wind behind it will be travelling at 65 m.p.h. in relation to the ground. But if it turns round it will accomplish no more than 15 m.p.h. A side wind will also affect a bird's progress to

An extent depending on wind velocity and the angle at which it blows with respect to the flight line. The air speed of the bird can be calculated if these are also determined. The ground speed equals the air speed if the former is determined when there is no wind.

The ground speed of a bird can be found by direct measurement using the speedometer of a car (or motor cycle) when the bird's flight line is parallel to a road. This was the method employed by Acharya and Hutson for determining the speeds mentioned earlier. A similar observation from an aeroplane directly gives the air speed of the bird because both bird and machine are equally affected by any wind. The method employed by Stuart Baker for the Needletailed Swifts is another method for determining the ground speed of a bird. The method consists in timing the bird over a known distance between two fixed points. Two observers are required to obtain accurate results. They should be stationed at a known distance apart on the line of flight and within view of or in signalling touch with each other. This method is especially suitable for occasions when the time at which the flight is likely to take place and its routes are known, as will often be the case with flights to and from roosts and on migration fly-lines.

In recent years, Radar has proved to be an effective means of tracking birds and determining their speed of flight. High speed electronic flash photography has also been successfully employed to determine the speed of flight of birds.

The greatest bird speed that has been reliably recorded appears to be that of the Peregrine Falcon. A hunting (diving) Peregrine was once timed with a stop watch and the speed attained was calculated as between 165 and 180 m.p.h. In level flight, the Peregrine attains 90 m.p.h. Swifts have been reliably recorded as flying at 90 to 100 m.p.h. The common flying speed of ducks and geese is between 40 and 60 m.p.h., of Starlings 45 m.p.h., and of Herons and Hawks between 22 and 28 m.p.h., while some of the small birds are such slow fliers that they attain only 10 to 17 m.p.h.

The table below gives the speed of flight of a few birds determined in Dehra Dun a few years ago. The birds were timed between two points in their flight path or from taking off to settling. The distance between the two points was then measured. There was only one observer. The distance over which the birds were timed varied from 110 to 500 feet. A stop watch and measuring tape were used for some observations but the timing device was often the observer's pulse and on such occasions the distance was measured

by pacing it. Because of the crude method employed, the results cannot be considered very accurate. All the observations were made when there was practically no wind. The birds were engaged in building nests, feeding their young, searching for food, or going to their roost.

Table showing Speed of Flight of some Birds

<u>Bird</u>	<u>Timing device</u>	<u>Speed, M.p</u>
Redrumped Swallow	Pulse	12
Purple Sunbird, female	do.	13
Purple Sunbird	do.	14
Purple Sunbird	do.	14
Rufousbacked Shrike	do.	15
Common Myna	do.	16
Paradise Flycatcher, male	do.	16
Hoopoe	Stop Watch	16
Hoopoe	do.	17
Hoopoe	Pulse	17
Pied Bush Chat, male	Stop Watch	17
Magpie Robin, female	do.	18
Magpie Robin	Pulse	18
Grey Hornbill	do.	18
Golden Oriole, female	Stop Watch	19
Golden Oriole, male	do.	20
Roller	Pulse	21
Blackheaded Myna	Stop Watch	21
Blackheaded Myna	do.	21
Jungle Myna	do.	20
Jungle Myna	do.	22
Coppersmith	do.	22
Whitebreasted Kingfisher	do.	23
Emerald Dove	Pulse	39

It will be seen from the table that in spite of the admittedly crude method employed, the results are surprisingly reproducible. There is good agreement between the pulse-and-pace method and the stop watch-and-tape method. The results can be considered to have sufficient value to help us to place the birds in some order of speed.

Accurate determinations of the speed of flight of birds will be useful in assessing: (1) what proportion of a bird's day is taken up with travelling, and (2) the effort involved in a particular activity such as collecting nesting materials or in finding food for the young.

: Acknowledgement

The writer is grateful to Gen. Sir Harold Williams for facilities kindly given to consult the books in his library.

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SOME UNCOMMON BIRD VISITORS IN AND ABOUT MY
GARDEN IN DELHI BETWEEN APRIL 1961 & MAY 1962

I have a small garden with many flowering shrubs and creepers. My neighbours on all sides have large trees in their compounds. The trees are mostly neem, with a few Moringa (Drumstick), Kijelia pinnata, Delonix regia, and orange and lime. The compound wall separating my house from theirs is low; so I enjoy the advantages of a large garden with tall trees. Most of the common birds visit our gardens but between April 1961 and May 1962 I had several uncommon bird visitors, though not all of them were migrants.

On April 28, 1961, two young Sirkeer Cuckoos (Taccocya leschenaultii) were calling from a dead neem tree at the edge of my front lawn. I watched them for several minutes before they flew away. They were much lighter in colour than adults and their bills were a pale orange. Sirkeers generally breed later -- from June to August, but there is a reference in the NIDIFICATION by Stuart Baker to a nest found on April 4, near Delhi. An adult Sirkeer visited my garden on November 12, 1961.

On October 6, a Tree Pipit (Anthus trivialis) was found on the rose bed. It had a conspicuous whitish supercilium and was heavily streaked on the breast. It was extremely wary when it landed and sat quietly for some time, but after a while started moving about and feeding in the grass along the rose bed. Something disturbed it, so it left.

A Wryneck (Jynx torquilla) came on October 16. It remained in our area till April 17. It was quite vociferous when it first came. I heard it quite often till November and it became silent thereafter. I watched it looking for ants and insects on the ground, against a wall, and high up in a tree. It resumed its call again in early April when I saw and heard it frequently.

On the afternoon of December 13, 1961, I heard what sounded like the Scarlet Minivet's call tui tui? tui tui?. I am familiar with this call but as the Scarlet Minivet is not found in the plains I guessed that it was the Shortbilled Minivet (Pericrocotus brevirostris) calling. The calls of the two birds are very similar. Then I saw the brilliant scarlet and black male with two yellow and black females, or one female with an immature male. They were on a neem tree. The tui tui? call was often followed by a soft gurgling. They frequented the tops of tall trees picking insects from the foliage. Occasionally the male was seen hawking insects. Once or twice they were found in the orange and lime grove. I saw and heard them regularly till March 24, 1962.

The Brown Shrike (Lanius cristatus) was the next important visitor in our neighbourhood. It is a rare visitor even for Delhi. It was seen in the orange and lime grove next door on February 20, 1962. I saw it sitting on a lime tree with a Redtailed Skink hanging from a thorn where it had impaled it. One evening it picked up a small lizard from the ground. It usually came to the grove in the late afternoon. Once I heard it warble softly with its bill closed for nearly fifteen minutes! I was only about 30 feet away and it was on a small shrub warbling away! Shrikes are excellent mimics, imitating notes and songs of other birds. Though its bill was closed I saw the vibrations in the throat very clearly. But this was not the first time that I heard a bird sing with its bill shut. It stayed for only a few days but paid a short visit again on March 2, 1962.

I was extremely fortunate in having the Crested Honey Buzzard (Pernis ptilorhynchus) as a visitor. On a few occasions I had seen it in our neighbourhood, but it came on a regular visit on March 10, 1962. It fed on a beehive nestled inside a Bougainvillea creeper trailing along the front wall of my house!

The Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura aureola) was not an infrequent visitor when we were living in a different house five years ago; but for some unaccountable reason I have not seen it in the garden of our new house during the last 5 years. It is one of the most lively birds that I have ever seen. It dances and pirouettes all the time and has a very attractive call. I was startled to hear its cheery call on March 22, 1962. It flew into the Kijelia pinnata tree opposite our house, sang once more and then disappeared.

The beautiful Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi) was another unusual visitor. It was a female or immature male in

chestnut plumage with a black crest. On April 10, 1962, it was in a neem tree in the backyard and disappeared in a few moments. This was the Paradise Flycatcher's second visit to my garden. Four summers previously I had a momentary glimpse of it in a shrub. Presumably the bird that came on April 10, paid a second visit on April 16. A row of Drumstick (Moringa) trees which were in flower had attracted a large variety of insects. Our Paradise Flycatcher in turn was attracted by these insects and was flitting about among the trees. My presence disturbed it and it flitted out of sight.

in/ The Great Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus stentoreus) was the most unexpected visitor. I first heard its call on April 30, 1962. It was a loud and slightly metallic call kak kak kee kakee kakee. Once heard carefully it is never forgotten. Although rather harsh the call has an attractive quality. I could hardly believe my ears. I was familiar with the bird and recently, while at Bharatpur, I had heard it daily. Surely it would not come to a garden! Then I saw it in a neem tree. It has been/our area for a whole week. I heard it even to-day (May 6). It generally calls in the morning and late afternoon. It is seen in every kind of tree and bush -- high and low -- mostly skulking, always seeking insects among the foliage. Last evening I saw two of these warblers in a shrub. According to Whistler the Great Reed Warbler may be found in gardens during migration.

Every morning, during the last week my first thought has been reserved for the Great Reed Warbler. Is it still here? And I strain my ears for the familiar call of kak. kak kee. kakee kakee

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

BIRD NESTING IN THE LODI GARDENS, DELHI

With the spring and summer months behind us, it is now possible to sit back and cast one's mind back over the past four or five months which covered the most important phase in the annual cycle of avian existence at least in the case of the majority of resident species - that of reproduction and perpetuation of the species.

My detailed observations during this period were confined to the Lodi Gardens (Lady Willington Park) which is one of the oldest parks in Delhi, dating back to the 15th Century. Covering an area of 100 acres, it consists of rolling lawns, copses, groves and woods. The wooded areas, mostly open, consist of the following species of trees: keeker (Acacia arabica), phoolai (Acacia

modesta), ooloo (Ailanthus excelsa), siris (Albizia lebbek), neem (Azadirachta indica), Anogeissus pendula, kachnar (Bauhinia purpurea), simul (Salmalia malabarica), dhak (Flame of the Forest) (Butea frondosa), amaltas (Cassia javanica, Cassia fistula), chikrasi (Chukrassia tabularis), Beef Wood (Casuarina equisetifolia), sheeshum (Dalbergia sissoo), pangra (Coral Tree) (Erythrina indica), jamun (Eugenia jambolana), Blue Gum (Eucalyptus citriodora), burr (Banyan) (Ficus bengalensis), pilkhan (Ficus infectoria), goolar (Ficus glomerata), peepal (Ficus religiosa), Silky Oak (Grevillea robusta), Jacaranda mimosaefolia, Sausage Tree (Kigelia pinnata), am (Mango) (Mangifera indica), bakain (Melia azadirach), Mulberry (Morus alba), gul mohr (Delonix regia), Putranjiva roxburghii, Mesquite (Prosopis juliflora), kusum (Schleichera trijuga), imlee (Tamarindus indicus), arjun (Terminalia arjuna), and ber (Zizyphus jujuba).

The Park is the site of the Lodi Tombs the oldest of which date back to 1494 A.D. It is about two miles south of Cannaught Place, the main shopping centre of New Delhi and in the very heart of the old residential area of New Delhi, though to the south and east new residential colonies have sprung up consisting of flats and bungalows with small patches of lawn and sparsely treed. The old residential area, however, is well wooded with large gardens and well-foliaged trees both in the gardens and along the various roads and avenues. The Park is well frequented and is a popular picnic resort. Its paths are also used as public thoroughfares by cyclists and pedestrians proceeding to and from offices and places of work. This background information is given to indicate that the Lodi Gardens are neither isolated nor deserted by humans and this is the context in which the following notes regarding the nesting activities of the various species in the Park area should be considered.

My interest in this Park both because of its historical background, and as I like to think its character as a potential bird sanctuary has taken positive shape since I moved in within a stone's throw of its boundaries just after the last monsoons. The spring and summer of 1962 provided me with my first real opportunity for observing nesting activities in the Park and these observations indicate that the area offers vast scope for detailed observation by bird watchers with particular reference to aspects like: (a) the influence of a 'composite' habitat with its varied food supply and nesting sites on the composition of its bird population; (b) the adaptation of the 'shy' species to this environment, particularly for nesting purposes - the Common Wood Shrike, the Baybacked Shrike, the Black Drongo, the Golden-backed Woodpecker, and the Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker are examples; (c) the proportion of successful brooding in terms of total nests built by the species.

During the period March to mid July 1962, the following nests were observed:

	<u>Nests built</u>
Black Drongo (<u>Dicrurus macrocercus</u>)	2
Roseringed Parakeet (<u>Psittacula krameri</u>)...	23
Common Green Pigeon (<u>Crocopus phoenicopterus</u>)	1
Blue Rock Pigeon (<u>Columba livia</u>)	16
Common Wood Shrike (<u>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</u>)	3
Baybacked Shrike (<u>Lanius vittatus</u>)	5
Common Myna (<u>Acridotheres tristis</u>)	11
Brahminy Myna (<u>Sturnus pagodarum</u>)	2
Large Green Barbet (<u>Megalaima zeylonica</u>)...	2
Crimsonbreasted Barbet (<u>Megalaima haemacephala</u>)	3
Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker (<u>Dryobates</u> <u>mahrattensis</u>)	1
Goldenbacked Woodpecker (<u>Dinopium benghalense</u>)	1
Purple Sunbird (<u>Nectarinia asiatica</u>)	1
Indian Brownbacked Robin (<u>Saxicoloides fulicata</u>)	3
Magpie-Robin (<u>Copsychus saularis</u>)	1
Tailor Bird (<u>Orthotomus sutorius</u>)	1
Ashy Wren-Warbler (<u>Prinia socialis</u>)	1
Redvented Bulbul (<u>Pycnonotus cafer</u>)	3
Whitecheeked Bulbul (<u>Pycnonotus leucogenys</u>)	2
Dusky Crag Martin (<u>Riparia concolor</u>)	1
House Swift (<u>Micropus affinis</u>)	1
Hoopoe (<u>Upupa epops</u>)	2

All the nests observed were typical though it must be obvious that these observations represent only a proportion of the total number of nests in the Park! I have also missed out some of the more obvious species, e.g. the Babblers which also must have their nests here.

A point that was brought out by these observations was the high percentage of casualties among certain external tree and bush nesting species, as the following figures will indicate:

<u>Name of the bird</u>	<u>Obs.</u>	<u>Survived</u>
Common Wood Shrike	3	2
Baybacked Shrike	5	2
Black Drongo	2	1
Common Green Pigeon	1	-
Purple Sunbird	1	-
Tailor Bird	1	-
Redvented Bulbul	3	1
Whitecheeked Bulbul	2	1

I estimated from the evidence available, e.g. remains of nests or their complete disappearance that man accounted for roughly one-third of these losses whereas the rest two-thirds could be attributed to crows and kites and other predators.

A feature of the nesting in the Lodi Gardens is the complete absence, in the majority of cases, of any attempt at camouflage by birds. The nest of the Redvented Bulbul and the Whitecheeked Bulbul were within sight and reach of a boy of 12 and in most cases it was the age group 12 to 18 which was responsible for the vandalism. The Purple Sunbird, the Tailor Bird, the Common Wood Shrike, the Baybacked Shrike and the Common Green Pigeon also suffered heavy decimation due to lack of adequate camouflage and the fact that in most cases the nests were within easy reach.

This is likely to be an important problem in the future as birds get more and more adapted to living in the midst of and with humans; they tend to take man for granted and seem to acquire a confidence which is not always respected.

In this note, I have merely indicated the broad pattern of nesting activities in the area and hope to give more detailed notes on some of the observations later.

Capt. N.S. Tyabji, I.N.

BIRDS FLYCATCHING

There seems to be some sort of fascination regarding the fact that sunbirds and some other insectivorous birds indulge in flycatching. In the pages of our Newsletter there has been quite a good deal of reference to this. There should really be little surprise that Sunbirds and Phylloscopii frequently take to the air in pursuit of small winged arthropods. In fact quite a large number of birds have to take to their wings in the process of feeding when they locate a prey which is a little quick in its getaway.

Sunbirds are habitually seen hovering before sprays of flowers while inspecting them for nectar, and spiders and also winged insects. They also make flycatcher-like sallies into the air when insects are hovering, or spiders are hanging or floating on their webs.

Willow-warblers also frequently flutter into the air in the course of their hunt among foliage of trees and bushes. It is a common sight to see wagtails of all species jumping up into the air as they run about on the grass. Whitecapped Redstarts and Plumbeous

Redstarts, Chats of all types, and even Drongos resort habitually to flycatching.

K.S. Lavkumar

REVIEW

THE BIRD LOVER'S BED-SIDE BOOK. Edited by R.M. Lockley Eyre and Spottiswoode. pp. 330. London 1958. Price

This anthology would make an excellent present for any bird lover. It must have taken years to collect, from diverse and unexpected sources material of so much value and interest. The editor has managed to pack into these pages an immense number of extracts from books, poems, short notes, and essays whose common factor is bird observation. Well-known ornithologists like David Lack are reproduced side by side with quotations by Aristophanes on the Hoopoe and Keats on goldfinches. Lockley himself contributes several pieces on those sea birds which are his particular passion.

In all there are one hundred and nineteen writers represented here. Not all of them are practicing naturalists but they are all fine writers. Every British poet seems to have written something about birds even if it was only in light heartedness. Here, for instance is William Cowper on the jackdaw.

There is a bird who, by his coat,
And by the hoarseness of his note,
Might be supposed a crow,
A great frequenter of the church,
Where, bishop like, he finds a perch,
And dormitory too.

It is the men like Julian Huxley, Gilbert White, and Konrad Lorenz who provide the really interesting contributions. None of the pieces would take longer than ten minutes to read, and that is the right length for those who do not have insomnia. The neat and compact size, the beautiful line drawings, and the careful production make the volume extremely pleasant to handle.

L.F.

NOTES & COMMENTS

Enquiries are often received about the circulation of our Newsletter. The maximum number that has been sent out so far has been 375, but subscribers today are in the region of about 125 and the present issue is being sent to about 250 people, about

..... 11

10 to persons abroad. The note in The Times of India, Bombay, about the availability of the Newsletter fetched quite a remarkable number of enquiries ranging almost from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. Readers must have noticed, however, that in recent issues the contributors are entirely the Regional Editors. This Newsletter must not be allowed to become merely a forum for the Editorial Board, and readers are requested to keep sending in notes of their observations however sketchy or unprofessional they may be.

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August is the month when Rosy Pastors start arriving in India. We hope that useful data will be collected about their movements by our readers this year along the lines suggested in an earlier number of the Newsletter. Incidentally there is an interesting article by Mr. Humayun Abdulali in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society Vol. 46(4), April 1947 on the movements of this bird in India. Two copies of the reprint are available with us, and will be sent to anyone who wants to read it.

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Reader, Shri Lalsinh M. Raol has a collapsible telescope with a 2 inch dia. objective lens, magnification not less than 40 x, with a contrivance for erecting the image thus making it very useful in bird watching, especially when they are far away. All the tubes of the telescope are of brass.

Shri Lalsinh M. Raol intends selling this telescope. Prospective buyers are requested to write directly to him at: 13 Jagnath Plot, Rajkot, for further details.

CORRESPONDENCE

In the July issue of the Newsletter I was very interested to read about Mr. Serrao's statement that wagtails in Kerala only roosted in the Java variety of sugarcane. I think, that he might throw some light on this as there is no reason really for birds to have any such partiality to crops. Wagtails roost in tall reeds, and also in tussocky grass, and if there is water around, they will also roost in small trees. Reeds bordering pools of water and growing in clumps in water are of course their favourite roosting places mainly no doubt because of the fact that such roosts provide the birds security, and they are close to their natural habitat. In places, where such vegetation is not available, they make do with other substitutes, and in Lahoul, we saw this summer a small flock of Hodgson's Pied Wagtails and later a very large

flock of recently arrived Yellowheaded Wagtails collecting to roost among pollarded willows -- there was nothing else for them to sleep in.

Shivraj Kumar's very interesting article on a visit to Piram Island in the same issue, has made me think. Could it not be possible for us to move the State Government to declare the island a sanctuary, and to have certain areas of the island forested, and closed to grazing? This would provide shelter to ground nesting birds, and so an introduction of the Grey and Painted Partridges might be worthwhile. A few pairs of chinkara which are rapidly vanishing from the mainland could find a permanent home here and people interested could go over and see them.

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May I suggest that in the subsequent issues you print the game regulations so that it might be possible for us to broadcast these to people we know and try to cultivate ethics of shooting in the country?

K.S. Lavkumar, Rajkot

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NEWSLETTER

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BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 2, No. 9

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RECOVERIES OF RINGED BIRDS

Information has been received that two of the migratory Spanish Sparrows (Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus), both adult males, ringed in Bharatpur earlier this year were recovered in Kirghizia, Russian Turkestan, in May/June. The particulars are as follows:

Date ringed	Ring No.	Place ringed	Date recovered	Place recovered	Remarks
31.3.62	A-21523	Bharatpur, Rajasthan, 27°13' N x 77°32' E	2.6.62	38 km. N. of Frunze (capital of Kirghizia) c. 42°30' N x 75° E.	c. 1800 km. more or less directly N. of Bharatpur
3.4.62	A-12039	-do-	29.5.62	-do-	-do-

Dr. E. Gavrilov of the Institute of Plant Protection, Alma-Ata, USSR, writes that in a campaign for the annihilation of these sparrows by poisoned grain, recently undertaken by the Djambul Plant Protection Station, over 1.8 million birds were destroyed. Of these 53,500 dead bodies were examined, amongst which were found 12 ringed birds. All except the above two had been ringed in the same locality in previous years.

That of some 3000 Spanish Sparrows ringed in Bharatpur during the 1962 Bombay Natural History Society/World Health Organization spring migration camp, presumably all originating more or less from the same general geographical area, only two should be found among 53,500 examined, is an indication of the astounding magnitude of the total population of these birds. It explains, and to some extent justifies, the need for the drastic control measures adopted. The damage these voracious hordes must cause to crops must be quite fantastic.

However, it seems worth while to explore the practicability of

canning, or preserving in some less expensive way, these tons and tons of good sparrow meat (at present probably wasted or at best used as manure) for the benefit of the protein-starved human populations in many underdeveloped regions of the earth. The same would apply to the innumerable masses of Blackfaced Weaver or Dioch (Quelea quelea) that are destroyed in Africa every year.

But of course some other medium than poisoned grain would have to be devised for killing the birds. Pressing as the need for containing the world's human population explosion is, it would perhaps be overdoing the thing to prescribe so drastic a remedy as a brace of poisoned sparrows for supper!

Sálim Ali

WHITEBROWED BLUE FLYCATCHER, MUSCICAPA
SUPERCILIARIS

I d e n t i f i c a t i o n: Smaller than the sparrow, light blue above and white below. Sides of head, neck, blue, darker than the back. A blue band or collar across the breast but broken in the centre. Prominent white supercilium from the front of the eye up to the nape.

H a b i t s: Rather a bold bird, visiting both gardens and evergreen forest. Generally hunts alone, but once two birds were seen feeding on the same tree. Hunts from the tops of large trees as well as evergreen bushes. It catches insects in the same manner as other flycatchers. Active, not still even for a moment.

V o i c e: Silent. I did not hear it call.

S t a t u s: First seen on February 24, 1950, at Kechi in Palamau District. Was with me up to February 27, when I left the place. No female observed.

N o t e: According to the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds 2:222, its range is from the Afghan frontier to Garhwal and western Nepal in the Himalayas. In winter it wanders as far south as Madhya Pradesh and Khandesh in Maharashtra. Bihar, therefore, lies much to the east of the distribution given by Stuart Baker. But in addition to myself, it has been reported by Law

from Hazaribagh and by Inglis from Darbhanga. All these three places lie in the western half of Bihar.

(Mrs.) Jamal Ara
Ranchi, Bihar

[According to Dr. S. Dillon Ripley (A SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, 1961, p. 426) the overall distribution of the species is: the northwestern Himalayas, east to west China and Burma. The winter range of the race aestigma Gray is given as: 'from 4000 feet down to the adjacent plains of Bengal, northern Orissa, Assam, East Pakistan, and Burma.' - Ed.]

A FEW LOCAL NAMES OF BIRDS FROM NEPAL

With reference to an appeal made in the Newsletter of June 1961 I have a few names of birds noted during my stay in Nepal. It appears that the common practice of naming the birds is from their call, or shape, or size. I give the names below.

<u>English name</u>	<u>Scientific name</u>	<u>Nepali name</u>
Jungle Crow	<u>Corvus macrorhyncos</u>	<u>thulo kak</u> | size
House Crow	<u>Corvus splendens</u>	<u>sano kak</u> |
Blue Magpie	<u>Urocissa sp.</u>	<u>lumba puchat</u> shape
Himalayan Tree-Pie	<u>Dendrocitta formosa</u>	<u>kokle</u> call
Redvented Bulbul	<u>Pycnonotus cafer</u>	<u>jureli</u>
Whitecheeked Bulbul	<u>Pycnonotus leucogenys</u>	<u>tarke jureli*</u>
Chloropsis	<u>Chloropsis sp.</u>	<u>hareva</u>
Dayal, or Magpie Robin	<u>Copsychus saularis</u>	<u>dhobi chara**</u>
Shama	<u>Copsychus malabarica</u>	<u>shama</u>
Whitecrested Laughing Thrush	<u>Garrulax leucolophus</u>	<u>seto tawke bulbul</u>
Shrikes	<u>Lanius sp.</u>	<u>bhadrai</u>
Drongos, or King Crows	<u>Dicrurus sp.</u>	<u>chibe</u>
Minivets	<u>Pericrocotus sp.</u>	<u>rani chara</u>
Hill Myna	<u>Gracula religiosa</u>	<u>Nepal myna</u>
Common Myna	<u>Acridotheres tristis</u>	<u>myna</u>
House Sparrow	<u>Passer domesticus</u>	<u>bhangera</u>
Swallows	<u>Hirundo sp.</u>	<u>gonthali</u>
Woodpeckers	<u>Picus sp.</u>	<u>toktoke</u>
Indian Koel	<u>Eudynamis scolopaceus</u>	<u>koeli</u>
Large Parakeet	<u>Psittacula eupatria</u>	<u>thulo suga</u> | size
Roseringed Parakeet	<u>Psittacula krameri</u>	<u>sano suga</u> |

<u>English name</u>	<u>Scientific name</u>	<u>Nepali name</u>
Blossomheaded Para	<u>Psittacula cyanocephala</u>	<u>rato tawke suga</u>
-keet		
Roller, or Blue Jay	<u>Coracias bengalensis</u>	<u>nilkanth</u>
Kingfishers	<u>Alcedo sp.</u>	<u>machhamar</u>
Hornbills	<u>Buceros sp.</u>	<u>garud</u>
Hoopoe	<u>Upupa epops</u>	<u>hud hud</u>
Owlets	<u>Athene brama</u> or <u>Glaucidium radiatum</u>	<u>latkoshero</u>
King Vulture	<u>Torgos calvus</u>	<u>rato tawke gidh,</u> <u>or kalo gidh</u>
Other vultures	<u>Gyps sp.</u>	<u>gidh</u>
Common Kite	<u>Milvus migrans govinda</u>	<u>cheel</u>
Brahmani Kite	<u>Haliastur indus</u>	<u>seto tawke cheel</u>
Pigeons	<u>Columba sp.</u>	<u>kabutar</u>
Emerald Dove	<u>Chalcophaps indica</u>	<u>hara dhukkur</u>
Doves	<u>Streptopelia sp.</u>	<u>dhukkur</u>
Red Junglefowl	<u>Gallus gallus</u>	<u>jungle kukhra***</u> & <u>jungle kukhri***</u>
Peafowl	<u>Pavo cristatus</u>	<u>mujur</u>
Kalij	<u>Gennaeus sp.</u>	<u>kalij</u>
Monal	<u>Lophophorus impejanus</u>	<u>monal</u>
Chukor	<u>Alectoris graeca</u>	<u>chakur</u>
Wood Partridge	<u>Arborophila sp.</u>	<u>pewra</u>
Lapwings	(any species)	<u>huti ti--u</u>
Egrets	(any species)	<u>seto bacullo</u>
Ducks	(any species)	<u>hun]</u>

*tarke, meaning crested; **dhobi chara includes all pied birds of about the size of Robin and Wagtails, as well as the Forktails; ***kukhra for male fowl, and kukhri for hen. chara, means bird.

P.W. Soman

FIELD RECOGNITION OF THE INDIAN BEE-EATERS

When the Bluecheeked Bee-eaters arrived in Delhi in May 1962, I had some difficulty in making the proper field identification with the common reference books. But the problem has been resolved, and I know that other birdwatchers must have experienced similar difficulty -- chiefly in distinguishing the Bluecheeked and Bluetailed Bee-eaters. For the sake of completeness, however, I include all six species of Indian bee-eaters in the descriptions below.

As a group, the bee-eaters have long, pointed wings, swallow-like flight, and hawk insects in mid-air by making graceful aerial sallies from a perch on a utility wire or tree. Most have long, black, curved bills.

1. Green Bee-eater, Merops orientalis

Field Marks: Slender, sparrow-sized. Green above, blue throat separated from green underside by a thin black bar. Some reddish on head. Narrow black line through eye. Two central tail feathers project beyond rest of tail.

Range: India, Ceylon, both Pakistans, Burma. In open country, up to about 5000 feet in the Himalayas.

Similar Species: Chestnut-headed is much more red-dish (chestnut) on head, has yellow (not blue) throat, no projecting tail feathers. Bluebearded is much larger, has no projecting tail feathers and more blue on underside.

ILLUSTRATED in colour in practically every Indian field guide.

2. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Merops leschenaulti

Field Marks: About the size of a bulbul. Forest species. Bright chestnut head and upper back; yellow throat separated from green belly by a black and chestnut band. No protruding tail feathers.

Range: Western India from northern Mysore south through Kerala, east to Madras State. Eastern M.P. north to U.P. and east to Orissa, Nepal, West Bengal, Assam, and East Pakistan. Ceylon. In well-wooded country, plains to 5000 feet.

Similar Species: Bluecheeked and Bluetailed only have yellow chin (not entire throat) and no breast bar, and have projecting central tail feathers. Range does not overlap with that of European.

ILLUSTRATED in colour in Ali's BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE AND COCHIN, and THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS; Henry's BIRDS OF CEYLON; and Smythies's THE BIRDS OF BURMA.

3. European Bee-eater, Merops apiaster

Field Marks: Larger than a bulbul. Northwest India. A gaudy bird with yellow throat separated from greenish blue breast and belly by a black line. Back chestnut and yellow. Central tail feathers project beyond rest of tail.

Range: Breeds in Kashmir, migrates through Rajasthan, Gujarat, and West Pakistan to winter in Africa. Recorded from Bombay, and the sub-Himalayas east to Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh.

Similar Species: Separate from Chestnut-headed by range. Bluetailed and Bluecheeked are more uniformly green, have no yellow on back, have yellow only on chin (not entire throat), and lack the breast bar.

ILLUSTRATED in colour in Peterson's A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE.

4. Bluecheeked Bee-eater, Merops superciliosus

Field Marks: Size of a bulbul. A graceful green bird with a yellow chin, chestnut throat, green rump and tail (the same colour as the back). Two projecting central tail feathers. Black eye patch. Bluish white forehead, supercilium, and line under eye patch. Back and underside uniformly grass green.

Range: Breeds in open country in West Pakistan, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Delhi and U.P. Migrates through Gujarat (including Kutch), Bombay, and coastal areas of western India and West Pakistan.

Similar Species: Distinguished from similar Blue-tailed by green (not blue) rump and tail, presence of light forehead and supercilium (which are absent in Bluetailed. Some Bluetails may have a very narrow pale supercilium.) Range does not overlap east of U.P. (See European.)

ILLUSTRATIONS: No good colour plates of this species. The plate in Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS more nearly resembles the Bluetailed.

5. Bluetailed Bee-eater, Merops philippinus

Field Marks: Size of a bulbul. A large green bee-eater with yellow chin, chestnut throat, black eye patch. Uniformly green above and below. Blue rump and tail. Tail with two protruding central tail feathers.

Range: Breeds in West Pakistan, Punjab, east through U.P., Nepal and Bihar to Assam, south to M.P., A.P., Madras, southern Maharashtra and northern Mysore. Presumably also East Pakistan. Winters in southern portion of range, to Ceylon.

Similar Species: Distinguished from the very similar Bluecheeked by absence of bluish white forehead and supercilium (Bluetailed may have a very narrow supercilium), and by the blue (not green) rump and tail. All other bee-eaters have either a breast band or no projecting tail feathers, or both. Bluecheeked not found east of U.P.

ILLUSTRATED in colour in Henry's BIRDS OF CEYLON; Smythies's THE BIRDS OF BURMA; and in black and white in Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS. The colour illustration in Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS more closely approximates this species than the Bluecheeked (note blue tail, only slight trace of supercilium).

6. Bluebearded Bee-eater, Nyctyornis athertoni

Field Marks: Large (size of myna). Forest species. Bright green above, with blue forehead, throat, and breast. Belly dark yellowish streaked with green.

Range: Western Ghats, A.P., north through Orissa and M.P. to U.P., east through Nepal, Bihar and West Bengal to Assam and East Pakistan. Plains and foothills to 5000 feet.

Similar Species: The only bee-eater with bright blue throat and breast, no breast band, and no projecting tail feathers.

ILLUSTRATED in Ali's INDIAN HILL BIRDS and THE BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE & COCHIN.

The projecting tail feathers may be absent in the young of a species that normally has these longer feathers. The other characters indicated, however, will serve to distinguish these birds.

Recent changes in the scientific names of the Bluetailed and Bluecheeked Bee-eaters necessitate a few changes in Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS (fourth edition).

On page 297, change the scientific name of the Bluetailed Bee-eater from Merops superciliosus to Merops philippinus. Where he refers in the text (second line of Distribution) to M.s. javanicus read Merops philippinus. Four lines below, the M. s. persicus referred to is Merops superciliosus persicus, the Bluecheeked Bee-eater.

Further, the colour plate of the Bluecheeked (Large Green) Bee-eater facing page 55 of Ali's THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS (sixth edition) is misleading, as I have indicated. At present the illustration is that of the Bluetailed Bee-eater and not, as indicated, of the Bluecheeked Bee-eater. Both species are actually much sleeker and slimmer than the illustration indicates.

Julian P. Donahue

THE FOOD OF THE MAGPIE ROBIN

Mrs. Ganguli's note in the Newsletter for May 1962
and the comments of Mr. Soman on the same in
Newsletter for June 1962

Some months ago I saw a male Magpie Robin with a four inch long, black-and-glistening blind-worm. The bird tried to kill the worm by knocking it repeatedly on the ground. When the worm had ceased to wriggle violently, the bird dropped it on the ground, pecked at it over and over again and then carried it away -- presumably to feed its young one. The blind-worm is believed by most people to be very poisonous!

On May 20, 1953, I was watching a family party of 2 adult and 2 juvenile Magpie Robins. The chicks had adult-size tails, but the chin, throat and breast were squamated. There were vestiges of the gape-spots, and the eyelids had a bald look about them.

A parent brought a very tiny frog which was alive and literally kicking. The prey was hardly as long as the bird's bill. The parent bird thrust the live frog, without in any way 'preparing' it for consumption, into the gaping mouth of a young one. The frog jumped away at once, but the parent bird caught it and thrust it into the other chick's mouth. The frog leapt away again, was recaptured and thrust into the mouth of the first chick. For the third time the frog jumped off, was recaptured and thrust into the mouth of the second chick which somehow managed to gulp it down.

While on the subject of unusual foods, I wonder whether others have noticed the Pond Heron (Paddy Bird) capturing and eating flies! Some years ago, at Rajahmundry, I saw a number of Pond Herons on top of a mango tree in an orchard. If I remember right, the trees were in flower then. Swarms of some large flies were buzzing round the trees. The Pond Herons snatched the flies by merely thrusting out their necks and making swooping movements!

Again, one does not normally see the Spotted Dove feeding on winged termites. Once, when a large swarm of winged termites had attracted the usual crowd of birds (crows, kites, bee-eaters, drongos, bulbuls, etc.) I saw a number of Spotted Doves on the ground busy picking up, and eating with relish, those insects which had lost their wings.

On 11 June, 1953, at 8 a.m., a pair of Common Grey Hornbills sat on a guava branch and with clumsy but expert movements, caught flying termites. Some they caught by turning somer-

saults around the perch; some they caught by merely snatching the insects which flow too close to their heads; but, most surprisingly, they often left the perch, flew a yard or two and actually hawked the flying insect! It was very amusing to see these clumsy birds imitating the Flycatchers. After a time, when most of the termites had lost their wings, a Grey Hornbill sat on a branch a foot above the ground and picked up the crawling insects from the ground.

K.K. Neelakantan

REVIEW

DOWN THE LONG WIND. By Garth Christian. pp. 236. Newnes Ltd. 1961. Price 21s.

'We are now beginning to know how much we don't know about migration' says Garth Christian and proceeds, in a book packed with accurate information, to tell us some of the things we do know.

There is no short-cut to discovering the full story of bird migration; the vast jigsaw puzzle has to be pieced together from minute but reliable items of information supplied by anyone who has the ability to use his eyes. The author has collected from various sources an enormous number of such reports, and most of them serve to pose new questions or to show up all those areas which are still unexpected and unknown. To make things more complicated it seems that the migratory pattern is not something absolutely static. There are slight shifts and changes taking place all the time (p. 36).

The radar screen, searching for aircraft has sometimes shown up flocks of birds apparently on their migratory journey, flying at a height at which they are invisible to the naked eye. In a few cases the birds have been identified; but it will not be long, the author says, before some device is thought up which will cut out the appearance of irrelevant things like birds. Before that happens, we must take full advantage of radar, and obtain whatever information it can give us. This ought not to be difficult in Britain, where almost every one is a birdwatcher and it is easy to press the man in the street to do work which is useful to ornithology. Britain after all is that country where the village postman asked Garth Christian not to post parcels in the usual pillar box, as he had seen a pair of tits preparing to build a nest in it.

L.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The British Trust for Ornithology, 2 King Edward Street, Oxford organizes a host of surveys every year relating to different aspects of bird life. Some of these are on a permanent basis, and are of the type which could be instituted in this country. We are trying to get data on how these surveys are organized, and the forms and cards used for recording observations. These could be adapted for our own use.

Just to give a general idea to our readers and to stimulate them to think along like lines, we are listing some of the work of the BTO information about which is available in its quarterly magazine, Bird Study.

Breeding census of common birds: Estimates are made of the number of breeding pairs in a locality, and then plotted on a map.

Sample census of Mute Swans: Reports show that counts obtained both from the ground and aerial surveys give comparable results. Members send in results of their counts, and also information on the relation of swans to other species and to agriculture, fishing, and other human activities.

Peregrine enquiry: Preliminary reports indicate that there has been a great reduction in the Peregrine breeding population in England. It is expected that this report will be completed by the end of 1962.

The following enquiries have been completed: Whooper Swan enquiry, Stone Chat enquiry, Road Deaths enquiry, Lapwing Habitat enquiry (incidentally this is something which could be easily done by our readers for both the Red- and Yellow-wattled Lapwing).

Deaths from toxic chemicals: This problem will get increasingly important for us now when India is 'modernizing' its farming operation. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the BTO have formed a joint committee on toxic chemicals. All deaths of birds due to these are to be reported to them. A special request has been made to farmers that in future seed dressings containing dieldrin, aldrin, and heptachlor will not be used at all for spring-sown grain, and for autumn and winter wheat only where there is a real danger from the wheat bulbfly.

Survey of roosting sites: This is again the type of work which can be done by us. In fact the report on the migratory wagtails of Kerala (April 1962) threw a new and interesting light on this problem. Similarly the discovery of the Common Swallow

roosting site in the mangroves in the Mahim Causeway, Bombay City, was somewhat of a revelation. Roosting sites of sparrows, parakeets, rosy pastors, which are easy to locate would be well worth studying.

Census of heronries 1959: 215 heronries of the Ardea cinerea were counted containing 3966 nests. Information relates to the largest heronries with 143 occupied nests, observations about population changes, and new heronry sites. About 180 people participated in this enquiry.

Finally let us aim to collect as much data as possible on the Rosy Pastors by the end of the current season, i.e. May 1963 (see Newsletter, March 1961).

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Hari Dang in his letter (see correspondence) suggests that the Newsletter publish the Game Preservation Laws of various States. Readers from various States are requested to comment on the substance as well as the operations of the Law applicable to their areas. A beginning has been made by giving some details of the Law in the State of Maharashtra.

BOMBAY WILD ANIMALS & WILD BIRDS PROTECTION ACT, 1951

The Law prohibits the shooting of all birds except those classified as vermin, e.g. crows and parakeets and others without a licence. The licence is obtainable only for game birds for shooting during the open season, i.e. from 1st October to 15th March. Honorary Game Wardens have been appointed with powers to apprehend law breakers. The maximum penalty is a fine of Rs500/- and six months' imprisonment.

Initially a Wild Life Preservation Officer was appointed by Government, but now his functions have been transferred to the Chief Conservator of Forests. Inevitably this step has made the operation of the Law much less effective. As far as we are aware no regular meeting of the Game Wardens are held, and many of the police stations are quite unaware that such a Law exists.

The Honorary Secretary of the Bombay Natural History Society has been very active in the enforcement of this Law, and has succeeded in instituting several prosecutions. However, unless very many more Game Wardens are prepared to take the same amount of trouble the birds of Maharashtra will continue to be killed in unauthorised ways.

CORRESPONDENCE

- a) Is there any reliable census of the Great Indian Bustard yet surviving? Is there even some rough idea?
- b) Are there any plans afoot for making a sanctuary for them in their habitat? Is there such a sanctuary already? Are there any Bustard in the Rajasthan sanctuary the name of which I forget? I refer to the one known for chinkara and geese.
- c) Are we, the Indian Ornithological Society, doing anything about this aspect of conservation? Are we in touch with the International Union for Conservation of Nature who are interested in, and offer some grants and assistance for the preservation of threatened species. Surely it should be possible to have some one do such a census as a first step!

Another point from a previous issue of the Newsletter is Lavkumar's suggest that the Newsletter should publish Game Rules. In so far as bird game is concerned this may be desirable, though not feasible. For a comprehensive game rules' considering the wide variations from one State of the Union to another this will be prohibitively lengthy. It would be much better to obtain all the diverse rules obtaining in all parts of India and get them published from the point of view of conservationists, and even more significantly from that of the conservation minded hunters. It is the latter whom we can enlighten to good results.

This pamphlet could be illustrated with sketches and sold cheap. If sufficient funds are forthcoming we might even be able to give it away. I can think of the Cheetal in which we have already printed the Game laws of some States, and the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, as possible partners in this publication. We might, with sufficient stimulation and momentum budge the inertia of the wild life departments of all States, whose productions hitherto have been remarkably obtuse not to say acutely harmful to the knowledgeable.

Hari Dang

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NOTES ON THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

The Great Indian Bustard, Choriotis nigriceps, is fast vanishing from the Indian avifauna. Two main reasons are usually assigned for its extinction: (1) indiscriminate persecution, and (2) conversion of grasslands into cultivated fields. Little information is, however, available from the Rajasthan desert about this bird except that Adams (1899, WESTERN RAJPUTANA STATE) wrote: 'It is met with in great numbers in various parts of the desert'. Surveys were, therefore, planned to gather information about this bird, locally known as godawan but pronounced as godaan. A trip to Sojat and to Jaisalmer was not very successful in January 1962. Shri R.S. Dharmakumarsinhji was also with us during this tour. In July 1962 we went again to Jaisalmer and stayed in the way at Lawan, Pokran, Bhiniyana and Chandan. Both the sides of the road were surveyed and where godawan was reported, extensive survey was carried out.

A group of four bustards was observed at Pokran on July 17 at 9 a.m. They were walking scattered in a flat valley in between two sand dunes. The ground was covered with grass, Pannicum antidotale. Locusts, mantis and dung rollers were the dominating insects in that area. As we tried to get closer for photographing, the bustards taxied and flew away. On the same day, another huge, magnificent male bustard was located over a flat scrubby land. It was 7 miles away from the previous group. This bird was not as wary as the earlier ones were. A young bustard, about one-third size of the young, was also observed the same day near village Chacha. It was sitting hidden in long grass near a small pond. Getting disturbed, it flew off with the same grace as the adult does. The record of the occurrence of young bustard in this desert may be of some meaning as, probably, breeding of this bird has not been hitherto reported from this region. Stuart Baker (1929, FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds 6:65-6) mentioned: 'They breed in the cold season in Southern India but over most of their haunts, after the rain breaks, from June to September'. On 21 July two groups of 5 and 2 Great Indian Bustards were again watched at Pokran. At 1 p.m. they were hiding under Salvadora plants and started walking as we approached

nearer. All these seven birds were in a grassland with Salvadora, Zizyphus, and Calotropis plants. Two birds were seen flying at 7.30 a.m. at Pokran on 21 July. The same day at Lawan we heard the hoonk of the bustard at night.

In addition to our personal observations we could collect some reliable data on this bird from local shikaris and from our staff posted at sixty of our Field Stations spread all over the desert. It will be rather unscientific to base any conclusion on such data, but it can easily be derived from the reports that the Great Indian Bustard is not so rare in the Rajasthan desert as it is believed to be and there is still a chance of its survival in the desert.

It is felt that Pokran-Chandan area is the place where a sanctuary for the Great Indian Bustard should be selected. These birds can be collected alive and kept in this sanctuary with their clipped wings. The entire area should be fenced and protected from poachers and natural enemies of the bustard. All necessary steps should be taken so that the bustard also breeds in this sanctuary.

Ishwar Prakash
Pulak K. Ghosh

Special Animal Studies Division,
Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur

A VISIT TO BHARATPUR, RAJASTHAN

The BNHS/WHO Bird Migration cum Virus Research Project had a field camp at Bharatpur in March 1962. I was fortunate to participate in this. This was my first visit to Bharatpur. The famous Keoladeo Ghana was something worth seeing and I deeply regret not having gone there earlier. I very strongly urge all readers of this Newsletter to visit this place at least once in September/October and once in January. The thousands of water birds breeding in September/October and the great masses of migratory waterfowl in January are sights which are well worth the trip to this place. A well-furnished bungalow with all facilities including food is maintained there by the Forest Department. Reservations can be made by writing to the Divisional Forest Officer, Bharatpur, Rajasthan.

In March the season for breeding was over and only a few well-grown Painted Storks were yet in the nests where they were being fed by their parents. Even so the number and variety of water birds presented an astonishing picture. Whitebreasted Waterhens scuttled among the roadside thickets. Common and

Purple Moorhens were in good numbers. Bronzewinged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas walked daintily on the water plants. Whitenecked, Painted, Openbill, Blacknecked, and Adjutant Storks were present. Large, Lesser, Little, and Cattle Egrets were in large numbers. Purple and Grey Herons stood statuesquely near the water's edge. Spoonbills were in large flocks. Sarus were abundant, one flock having 266 birds. Unfortunately the Siberian Crane which visit the sanctuary every year had already departed. This sanctuary is one of the few places in India where this beautiful crane is seen regularly in small numbers. Amongst the resident waterfowl Nukta, Spotbill and Cotton Teal were present in fair numbers. The Cotton Teal were remarkably tame. Migratory duck such as Pintail, Widgeon, Shoveller, Pochard, Brahminy Duck, Common and Garganey Teal were present. The Garganey were in beautiful plumage and the males were displaying. A flock of Barheaded Geese presented a beautiful picture as they fed on the green meadow of one of the bunds.

The Ghana jungle was full of a variety of birds including the Spotted Tree Creeper. While other members of the party saw this bird I was not lucky enough to see it in spite of attempts to do so. There were 14 varieties of birds of prey. What a wonderful sight it is to see the magnificent Imperial Eagle soaring in the clear blue sky. Pallas's Fishing Eagles were in some numbers, no doubt attracted by the numerous fishes in the shallow water of the Ghana bunds. Hoopoes were breeding in the groves of kadamb trees. There are a few patches of these magnificent trees left and they bring to mind the Celestial Cowherd and his Lilas. These kadams provide a home to numerous tree hole nesting species of birds. Tree Sparrows, Crimsonbreasted Barbets and Brahminy Mynas fought over favour nesting sites. A Dhayal chased away an Orangeheaded Ground Thrush from its territory. The latter is a winter visitor to this area. Flocks of Rose Finches were feeding in the scrub in the open places in this magnificent grove. The patches of thick scrub near the water harboured Bluethroats and Great Reed Warblers, and the latter's loud call is a feature of the bunds.

In one of the bunds in the 7000 acre Ghana there was a patch of reeds of about one-tenth of an acre in area. These reeds were only suitable reeds for roosting in the whole Ghana. During the first period of our stay only a few Wagtails came to this roost. Later on 22 March over a hundred birds were observed. On 26 March about a thousand birds came. Numbers of Great Reed Warblers and Common and Cliff Swallows also came. The reeds used to be bent under the weight of these birds. A few Baillon's Crakes were seen in this patch of reeds. This patch of reeds was very suitable for netting operations, and 300 Wagtails as well as some Swallows and Great Reed Warblers were caught. Most of the wagtails were in full breeding plumage and what lovely

birds they were. The Short-tailed Yellow Wagtail, Motacilla flava simillima, which is a migrant from Manchuria and adjoining countries was also caught here together with the White Wagtail, Blackheaded Yellow Wagtail, Blueheaded Wagtail, and Grey-headed Wagtail. Handling these brilliant hued birds was a pleasure and even old hands at the game used to go into raptures at the sight of an adult Blue- or Greyheaded Yellow Wagtail in full breeding plumage.

Before the Wagtails started coming to this roost, catches of birds were so meagre that we had planned to break up the camp when by a lucky chance H.H. The Maharaja of Bharatpur insisted on our staying over an extra day and mentioned that he had seen a large number of birds along the Deeg Road. We went there and saw some large flocks of Spanish Sparrows feeding in fields and settling in dense flocks in the trees among the wheat and gram crops. Enquiries revealed they roosted in a nearby scrub forest. On going there we found a gigantic roost of Spanish Sparrows and the migratory race of the House Sparrow, the Turkestan House Sparrow, Passer domesticus parkini. Incredibly large numbers of birds were seen arriving from the surrounding countryside which was full of green but ripening wheat and gram crops as far as the eye could see. Soon every tree and bush was full of these hordes of birds and the chatter could be heard a long distance away. As it became dark the birds settled to sleep and all was quiet.

We were full of excitement at having discovered this veritable gold mine. Plans for departure were hastily cancelled. Next day we put up some nets and in no time caught 122 birds. Netting was continued for some days and a total of 1294 Spanish Sparrows and 457 Turkestan House Sparrows were caught. The camp had to be closed and there were insufficient bags and cages for holding the birds; otherwise the total could have been even ten times more than this. Lakhs of birds were at this roost. The damage they must cause to the wheat must be considerable but probably insignificant when one visualises the enormous area of wheat and gram cultivation in the Punjab, U.P. and Rajasthan. Now one could believe that in Kafiristan these sparrows were so abundant in spring that as one author writes: 'even a blind old widow could have at least one meal of these birds'. The male Spanish Sparrow is a really handsome bird with his chestnut crown and bold black streaks on his breast. While small flocks of these Sparrows were seen in Bharatpur, and larger flocks in western Rajasthan, nowhere have such enormous swarms been reported as were seen at this roost.

The Keoladeo Ghana is now a recognised Bird Sanctuary and will in due course be a major tourist attraction. Due to its proximity to Agra, Jaipur, and Delhi there are excellent prospects

of foreign tourists coming there. Much has been done and much remains to be done in this unique Bird Sanctuary. For instance the water hyacinth which at one time covered the water has been eradicated. Roads are being repaired and improved. Many nesting trees are now dying due to what appears to be excessive water logging. A system of lock gates and small canals to drain out some areas with trees is advisable. Certain bunds can be kept full of open water perennially. The fish supply could be augmented by putting in some other varieties of quick growing fish. Collection of firewood and grazing could be stopped in some selected areas too.

All too soon we had to bid adieu to this wonderful Bird Sanctuary to hurry home to other activities, but all of us will ever cherish the memories of the happy days we spent there and the kindness and hospitality of H.H. The Maharaja of Bharatpur.

Yuvraj Shivrajkumar

FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF THE BROWN ROCK CHAT

The Brown Rock Chat (Cercomela fusca) is a bird endemic to India (i.e. it is found nowhere else in the world), but because of its close resemblance to the female Indian Robin (Saxicoloides fulicata) it may be easily overlooked.

The Brown Rock Chat is a northern bird, found from West Pakistan to western West Bengal, south to northern Gujarat and M.P. The range of the Indian Robin, however, is much wider than this.

Boulders, rocky places, and ruined forts are among the places Brown Rock Chats prefer, but I have seen a few near cultivation in Rajasthan. In size and coloration they bear a close resemblance to the female Indian Robin, even to the almost black tail which, especially during flight, contrasts with the brown back. The female Indian Robin may always be told by her chestnut coloured vent - but this is not always easily seen. I find the best, and quickest, distinguishing criterion is behaviour.

After taking a few steps on the ground, or immediately after landing, the Indian Robin raises its tail very high - usually so it is perpendicular to the back. The Brown Rock Chat, on the other hand, never, to my knowledge, raises the tail more than a few degrees above an imaginary line from the head to the rump. The effect, then, is that the tail is in line with the body, or drooped below that line, and is slowly wagged. The Indian Robin raises its tail with a quick jerk to a very high position.

Both birds frequently occur side by side, as on Tughlakabad Fort in Delhi, but the Indian Robin is far more common and less specific in its choice of habitat.

Julian P. Donahue

NEST-SHIFTING BEHAVIOUR OF THE ASHY WREN-WARBLER

(Reproduced from The Auk 78:435-6, July 1961)

The Ashy Wren-Warbler, Prinia socialis Sykes, is a common bird found mainly in the central, western and southern parts of the Indian Union, East Pakistan, and Ceylon. Its nesting season ranges from March to September but more commonly immediately after the onset of the monsoon. It is known to build two types of nests (Salim Ali, 1956; Dharmakumarsinhji, 1955). One is similar to that of a tailor bird (Orthotomus sutorius sutorius Pennant) and is constructed by arranging fibres in a circular manner inside of a funnel formed by one or two leaves stitched together at the margin. The other is an oval bag of woven fibres stitched together with several supporting leaves. I have noticed a third variety in a hedge (Clerodendron phlomidis) where the bag of fibres was attached to the slender twigs only by means of cobweb without incorporating the small leaves of the plant. The species is known to require about two weeks for completion of its nest. The clutch size is three or four, and the period of incubation 12 days.

Early in July immediately after the first rains, I noticed in my garden a pair moving about together and copulating on a tree at a height of about five meters from the ground. On 12 July they started building a nest on a plant (Nyctanthus arboritris) at about 65 cm. from the ground, both the male and the female participating in the construction. The nest was of the first type, with only two leaves sewn together because the leaves of this plant are large. On the 17th I built a hide at a distance of about one meter from the nest and took photographs. With the click of the camera the bird was visibly restless and agitated. I again took photographs on the 19th. On the morning of the 20th, when I was in the hide watching the birds, to my astonishment I found them by turns removing the nest material bit by bit. They first started with some of the cobweb material and then with the fibres. Each time the bird flew directly to a spot about 30 metres away, and I found that a new nest was being built there with the material of the old nest, this time on another plant (Lantana camara) at about the same height. This nest was of the second type, probably because the leaves of this plant were smaller. During the building of the first nest

the birds always came to the nest by a circuitous route through shrubs and hedges, and the rate of building was also rather slow. But in the building of the second nest, flight was direct from the original nest to the second; the frequency of the flights to the nest was naturally several times greater. By the evening of the 22nd practically all of the nest material had been shifted. On the 23rd I watched both the birds bringing material at dusk late in the evening. On the morning of the 24th I noticed in the new nest the first egg of the clutch; the second appeared on the 25th, the third on the 26th, and the 4th on the 27th.

On 6 August I built a hide near this nest and took a few photographs. On the next morning to my surprise I found that all the four eggs had disappeared from the nest and that there were no pieces of the shell to be found anywhere around. However, I did see the bird visit the nest until noon but not later. On the 9th I noticed the pair again selecting a nesting place. They even inspected the remnant of the nest but did not build there. The hide at this nest had been removed after the second nest was completed, and so there was nothing to dissuade the birds from nesting there. They selected a spot on the opposite side, thus making the location of the three nests at the three angles of a triangle, more or less equidistant from each other, with the second nest at the apex of the triangle. The second nest was completely abandoned, and the third nest was built by the side of the compound wall with freshly collected material. This time the plant chosen was Bougainvillia spectabilis, and the type of nest was the same as the previous one. The process of nest building was at the usual speed. On 18 August when this was nearing completion, I noticed, and so did these nesting birds, a Crow-pheasant (Centropus sinensis Stephens) that came from the direction of the second nest to this nest and put its head into it for eggs or young ones. This suggested the fate of the four eggs in the second nest. The birds thereafter abandoned the nest and did not nest again for the year. Ordinarily their nesting season extends from March to September.

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BIRDS FROM THE SURAT DANGS (GUJARAT STATE)

Readers of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers may be interested in a few definite records of some of the uncommon and rare birds collected by me in the Surat Dangs, Gujarat State. The Dangs consists of a tract of hilly teak and bamboo country south of the Tapti River which lies between the Nasik-Kandesh Deccan and the south Gujarat plain. This area has tropical moist deciduous and tropical semi-evergreen plant life. It has an annual average rainfall of about 80 inches.

Five species of birds: the Montagu's Harrier, Circus pygargus (Linn.), the Small Cuckoo, Cuculus poliocephalus poliocephalus Latham, the Indian Cuckoo, C. micropterus micropterus Gould, the Indian Pitta, Pitta brachyura brachyura (Linn.), and the Whitethroated Ground Thrush, Zoothera citrina cyanotus (Jardine & Selby) were collected in the Dangs area and reported to the Honorary Secretary of the Bombay Natural History Society for publication in the Journal. Therefore, these five birds will not be mentioned in greater detail here.

Twelve other species which are uncommon or rare in the Surat Dangs will be listed under their respective family names, as follows:

Family : Ardeidae

Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax (Linn.) : The Night Heron

Specimens collected on Oct. 13 at Ahwa, one male and a female both in breeding condition. It is an uncommon resident in the Dangs.

Family : Accipitridae

Accipiter virgatus subsp.? : The Besra Sparrow Hawk

Specimen on April 16, 1954 at Bhawandagad, an immature bird. It is very rare in the Dangs and elsewhere in Gujarat State.

Family : Alaudidae

Calandrella cinerea dukhunensis (Sykes) : The Short-toed Lark

Specimens on Oct. 20, 1954 at Ahwa, two non-breeding males. These were identified by Dr. Biswamoy Biswas of the Indian Museum, Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta.

Its status is uncertain in the Dangs and in Gujarat State.

Family Muscicapidae

Copsychus malabaricus malabaricus (Scopoli) : The Shama

Specimen on Feb. 18, 1955 at Mahal, a non-breeding female. It is a rare resident in the Dangs.

Myiophoneus horsfieldii horsfieldii (Vigors) : The Malabar
Whistling Thrush

Specimen on Mar. 25, 1954 at Ahwa, a non-breeding female. It is an uncommon resident in the Dangs.

Family Motacillidae

Anthus hodgsoni hodgsoni Richmond : Hodgson's Tree Pipit

Specimen on January 29, 1954 at Mulchond, a non-breeding male. Uncommon winter visitor in the Dangs.

Anthus novaeseelandiae waiti Whistler : Paddyfield Pipit

Specimen on Oct. 20, 1954 at Ahwa, a non-breeding male. It was identified by Dr. B. Biswas. It is of uncertain status in the Dangs and elsewhere in Gujarat State.

Motacilla flava beema Sykes : Blueheaded Yellow Wagtail

Specimen on Mar. 30, 1955 at Bardipada, a non-breeding female. It is an uncommon winter resident in the Dangs.

Motacilla maderaspatensis Gmelin : The Large Pied Wagtail

Specimen on Dec. 31, 1955 at Mheskatri, a male in breeding condition. It is an uncommon resident in the Dangs.

Motacilla indica Gmelin : The Forest Wagtail

Specimen on Mar. 30, 1955, at Bardipada, a male. It is a rare winter visitor in the Dangs.

Family Laniidae

Lanius cristatus cristatus Linnaeus : The Brown Shrike

Specimen on Nov. 30, 1953 at Mulchond, a non-breeding male. It is a rare winter visitor in the Dangs.

Family Sturnidae

Sturnus pagodarum (Gmelin) : The Blackheaded or Brahminy Myna

Specimens on: July 3, 1955 at Ahwa, a female in breeding condition; Feb. 24, 1956 at Mulchond, a non-breeding male.

It is a sparse and local resident in the Dangs and elsewhere in the Gujarat State.

Altogether I have seen 290 species of birds in the Surat Dangs. Out of this number 140 species were collected. These specimens are now in the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

(Rev.) Ernest M. Shull
Dangs Rural Boarding School, Church
of the Brethren Mission, Ahwa,
via Billimora, Dangs Dist.,
Gujarat

REVIEW

GUJARAT KE PAKSHI. By Rajeshwar Prasad Narain Sinha. The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. 1958. Price Rs12.50.

In recent years books have been written in some of the regional languages of India about the birds of the region concerned. The book under review is in Hindi and is called GUJARAT KE PAKSHI. The author says he has written this book because there is no book even in English today in which all Indian birds are described. He also says that there are many birds in India which have not yet been identified or named.

Clearly the author is ignorant of the knowledge already accumulated on Indian birds or else he has chosen to ignore it. The result is a book full of confusion, inaccuracies, mistakes, and misleading statements; a book which fosters misconceptions instead of countering them. It is to be regretted that such a book should have been published by the Government of India.

Of the many serious mistakes in this book I shall mention only two. The bird which is described under the name chatak on p. 47 is the Pied Crested Cuckoo. Its plumage is described as being pure black. Take, again, the case of the distribution of the Paradise Flycatcher. This bird occurs in Turkestan, Afghanistan, and further east. But the author would have us believe that it comes from Africa and returns there in autumn. The chapter on abbabil is a model of confused thinking on swifts and swallows.

It is difficult to believe that such gross mistakes are possible in a book which claims to be authoritative. Some of the drawbacks

of this book arise from the uncertainty about the Hindi names of birds. The author has found it convenient to use the English names in a few cases. He might have done it with advantage for all the birds. The inadequacy of the names has confused the author himself. The sacred birds of Pakshithirthan are popularly known by the name garud. The author also calls them garud without considering what they are. If you look at picture No. 46 of the sacred birds and read the description of the Scavenger Vulture (p. 160) you will find that they are in fact the same. The author has been misled by the confusion in the names.

Often the author is carried away by his poetic fancy, and he lets imagination take the place of reality. In describing the nest of the sunbird he says, correctly, that it is lined with soft material inside. Then he cannot resist the temptation to add that inside the nest, husband and wife sleep happily together. This is pure imagination. The male sunbird, of course, never enters the nest!

There are numerous selections, in this book, of passages dealing with birds chosen from Indian literature. Although the treatment of this subject is cursory, whatever the author has given is interesting and one wishes that he had confined himself entirely to this aspect of the study of Indian birds.

J. G.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

At the XIII world conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation held in New York in June 1962 at which India was represented along with some 30 other national sections, together with representatives of several international organizations and observers, a number of important resolutions were passed for submission to the various governments. Those of special pertinence to India are as follows:

'2) Having noted that pesticides will often: (a) have a lethal effect on birds and other animals though this may only become apparent after one or more years, (b) kill insect predators of the pest so that in spite of an initial satisfactory control soon after application an exceptionally heavy infestation may follow,

'RECOMMENDS that Governments adopt legislation by which all pesticides must only be applied at minimum effective concentration since the cumulative effects are largely unknown;

'RECOMMENDS that continuing research be prosecuted on the longterm effects of pesticides with the object of elaborating control methods, both biological and chemical, which are

harmless to birds and other vertebrates and to beneficial insects.

'4) Having noted the critical decrease in the number of various species of birds of prey in many countries,

RECOMMENDS to Governments that they combat through educational measures the widespread but erroneous opinion that all these birds are harmful, in order to diminish or stop their persecution.

'5) RECOMMENDS that Governments restrict, by all means at their disposal, the importation of wild birds to those birds whose exportation fully complies with the laws of their country of origin.

'13) Having noted that the system of paying bounties for the destruction of birds has been demonstrated to be an expensive, indiscriminate and ineffective method of population control, that it tends to have extremely harmful side effects, particularly in leading to the unauthorized killing of protected species of birds of prey, that it has a lamentable psychological effect, and that its abolition will be an important step towards the adoption of a more objective attitude towards bird life and towards more rational methods of game management,

RECOMMENDS that the system of paying bounties for destruction of birds be totally abolished.'

It is to be hoped that the Indian Board for Wild Life and the State Wild Life Boards will take note of these recommendations and implement them in the appropriate manner.

Great Indian Bustard CORRESPONDENCE

As Chairman of the Bird Wing of the Indian Board for Wild Life let me try to answer some of the questions asked by Mr. Hari Dang in the Correspondence section of the September Newsletter.

(a) So far we have no census, reliable or otherwise, of the Great Indian Bustard. The bird is so sparsely and patchily distributed, and over such wide and far-flung areas, that it would be exceedingly difficult to make an overall count for the entire country without considerable organization and expense. However, from the available information it would appear that there are certain areas where the bird can still be seen in small numbers, but fairly regularly. It is not in the interest of the bustard public to disclose details!

(b) & (c) The Indian Board for Wild Life had recommended to the government of undivided Bombay State the formation of a sanctuary for the Great Indian Bustard and even suggested a suit-

able area in Gujarat for investigation of its possibilities. In the turmoil surrounding the bifurcation of the State, the matter got relegated to the background. Under the new dispensation it seems that the site originally proposed has been earmarked for other purposes and is no longer available. There are, of course, other places in other States that might be investigated for suitability, but unless there is assurance that State governments are in earnest about the matter and that adequate funds and facilities would be forthcoming for proper watch and ward, it would be folly to go ahead. Without the necessary protective staff it would only help to advertise the haunts to poachers and lead to a further reduction of the bustard population with virtual impunity.

It is quite true that the possibility of obtaining funds from international sources for a rational scheme for the preservation of the bustard is perhaps greater now than ever before. Actually it is proposed to prepare a comprehensive project for a thorough-going study of the ecology of the bird -- including its local (seasonal?) movements, reproduction rate, and population dynamics -- by a trained ecologist with proved practical experience, for submission to the International Union for Conservation of Nature through the International Council for Bird Preservation of which India is a member.

Sálim Ali

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The Cattle Egret

I had a chance to watch a group of nests of the Cattle Egret (Bubulcus ibis). It was a pleasure to watch these birds in their breeding plumage (orange-buff head, neck and back). There were altogether 13 nests built on a tamarind tree. Each of the nests contained one to two young ones. These young birds had black beaks unlike their adults which were with yellow beaks. This was observed at Ghodbunder Road near Goregaon in the month of August 1962.

Being unable to get any information regarding the colour difference of the beaks of young ones and adults, please be kind enough to let me know when the colour change (from black to yellow) takes place and also suggest some references regarding the same.

R. S. Prasad

[It is not definitely known when exactly the colour of the bill changes from black to yellow, but presumably in the second year.

- Ed. 7

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Morning Song of Birds

A word about the dawn chorus - there was some very interesting material regarding this in the 'Newsletter for Birdwatchers' recently. Here are my observations for what they are worth. Both in Chandbag, Dehradun, and at Devnar, Chembur, I heard the Drongo call first: on 26th April (last summer) at Devnar, I timed his call at 0550 and next morning at 0553. Soon after, by 0610, the other songsters in the garden had joined the chorus, the White-cheeked Bulbul, the Fantail Flycatcher, the Oriole, the Iora, the Warbler and the Tailor-bird. At Nainital, at the Vidya Mandir Campus, it was the Thrush (the Whistling Schoolboy) who was the first to burst into that lovely dawn with its song.

Observer

in Shri Shivaji Preparatory Military School's
Samachar, No. 83, 31st July, 1962

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Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Nice of you to send me your birdwatchers' newsletter. I honestly like it very much because it is still a specialized house magazine, has resisted all temptations to be glossy, and has an air of intimacy about it. I hope you will never have enough money to become glossy - that would spoil it.

Amita Malik, New Delhi

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Bird News

Julian Donahue and I have been doing some birdwatching since I came back. He has added six new birds to the Delhi list! Sir Harold Williams is revising the checklist of Delhi birds. He was here in that connection. He hopes to bring it out soon.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli, Delhi

July 1962

Vol. 2, No. 8

p. 4, 12th line from top, and p. 5, 4th line from bottom, for 'Kejelia pinnata', read 'Kigelia pinnata'.

p. 4, 4th line from bottom, for 'April 17', read 'April 23'.

Vol. 2, No. 9

p. 11, 23rd line from top, for '15th March', read '31st March'.

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NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS

VOLUME 2-1962 GIFT SUBSCRIPTION



NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 2, No. 11

November 1962

OCCURRENCE OF WADERS IN PATNA - 1948-51

During the years 1948-1951 when I was posted in Patna, I had occasion to examine different live species of migrant waders which were snared in winter by the bird catchers of Gulzarbagh, a suburb of Patna and hawked daily during the season to the residents of Patna. By arrangement with these dealers these birds used to be brought to my residence and various specimens were purchased by me for detailed study and identification. Since I had to go out of Patna on tour some time, the records are not continuous but are rather important as regards the occurrences of various species and the dates of their arrival.

It will be seen that I had come across some very rare and interesting species which in their wintering ground, generally frequent coastal areas and rarely visit inland, e.g. Rednecked Phalarope, Turnstone.

These freshly caught waders which were examined by me were identified from two standard books, viz. THE HANDBOOK OF BRITISH BIRDS, by Witherby, Jourdain, Ticehurst, and Tucker, Vol. IV (1945), containing colour plates of birds in their juvenile plumage, male and female adult plumage, and summer and winter dress, and James Fisher's excellent handbook (Penguin A 175) BIRD RECOGNITION Vol. I (Seabirds and Waders) [1947], usefully illustrating and describing all waders in winter and summer plumage.

Some of the uncommon birds which were met with are described below.

Grey Plover, Pluvialis squatarola (Linnaeus): Collected 25 September 1948, 21 Sept. 1949.

The specimens were still in summer plumage, with cheek, sides of neck and underparts up to vent black, and upper parts mottled grey. The vent was pure white unlike the Asiatic Golden Plover's. The white band bordering the black underparts from forehead up to abdomen was noted in my specimen but in some books this is illustrated as partly concealed under the wing. Fisher's BIRD RECOGNITION has correctly illustrated the full band.

Eastern Golden Plover, Pluvialis dominica (P.L.S. Müller)

The specimen which came into my hand on 30 August 1950 was still in summer plumage. The bright gold, white and black coloration was unmistakable. Another bird was seen with the hawkers on 9 Sept. 1948, also in summer dress.

Eastern Curlew, Numenius arquata (Linnaeus)

The bird with marine habitat came in the bird catchers' bag on 26 Sept. 1950, along with Greenshank, Redshank, and Eastern Knot. It was in winter plumage and its wing pattern was as shown in Witherby's HANDBOOK, plate 108. Its tapered and decurved bill was 5 inches and body 14 inches: total 19 inches. Height of leg 6 inches.

This bird occurs commonly in winter in Bengal on the seafront of the Sundarban area and it is often brought to Calcutta from Port Canning railhead.

Blacktailed Godwit, Limosa limosa (Linnaeus): Collected 21 Sept. 1949, 30 Aug. 1950..

These were already in winter plumage without any chestnut on lower parts. The birds are snared in considerable numbers around Patna.

Turnstone, Arenaria interpres (Linnaeus)

A male was procured on 19 September 1950, and it remained captive with us for a week in the back garden, with its feet tied lightly with a string fastened to a tree. Size about 9 inches. It was interesting to watch the bird turn over stones and small impediments in its beak - in search of insects, as it does in the wild.

Eastern Knot, Calidris tenuirostris (Horsfield)

Obtained in 1950 on 30th and 31 August, and 26 September. The first two birds were in partial summer plumage with chestnut breast. The third bird was a female in winter plumage and beautiful grey coloration of its whole body, head and bill was as per the life size sketch in the HANDBOOK, p. 231.

Curlew-Sandpiper, Calidris testaceus (Pallas)

Collected on 23 Sep. 1949, along with Redshank, Greenshank, and Ruff. Its beak (37 mm.) was fine, longish, and decurved. Underparts white but breast faintly streaked brown. Size 7½ in. The rump being white the specimen was not a Dunlin which it resembles.

Rednecked Phalarope, Phalaropus lobatus (Linnaeus)

The single specimen collected on 20 September 1950 was in winter plumage, 7 in. long. It was a dainty and sprightly bird with slender pointed bill which adorned the handsome black and

white head.

The Phalaropes have webbed toes, fringed with skins, and when my bird was put in a bath-tub it swam bouyantly. It remained alive for 2 days.

Unlike other birds, it is the female of the species which rather aggressively courts the male and so the male has been described by a poet as follows:

'The Phalarope, besides Red-necked,
Is also horribly hen-pecked.' .. Liliput, May 1949.

Other Waders

Other common waders which were snared and shown to me every year in early winter, for which brief notes were kept, are noted below with the earliest dates on which these were secured in the four-year period. The birds were mostly in winter plumage.

Little Ring Plover (27.20.51); Spotted Redshank (14.9.50); Common Redshank (marginal white crescent in wing) 3.8.49; Greenshank (31.7.50); Green Sandpiper (3.8.49); Wood Sandpiper (19.8.51); Common Sandpiper (30.8.50); Little Stint (26.9.50); Temminck's Stint (31.7.50); Ruff and Reeve (31.7.50); Blackwinged Stilt (Resident and local migrant) 6.10.49.

M e t h o d o f s n a r i n g

I may describe briefly how these waders are snared by the bird catchers of Gulzarbagh (Patna). They go out to the swamps, marshes, and wet fields where the waders come for feeding and they implant stuffed waders mounted on sticks at places where the birds are likely to descend. These decoys are placed in a circle round which sticks smeared with bird lime are stuck in the ground. Then the bird catchers from a little distance imitate bird calls by placing fingers in their mouth, in a most expert manner. The waders are thus attracted and on descending on the ground near the dummies they get entangled in the sticks. The catchers then extricate the birds and put them in a covered basket and repeat the operation.

P r e v i o u s R e c o r d s

In J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. Vol. 40, p. 338, P.D'Abreu reports that while at Patna bird catchers brought to him Turnstone (a young male) in September 1937, and a Rednecked Phalarope (female) in November 1937, both in winter plumage. Earlier in the same Journal (Vol. 39:419) he reports from Gulzarbagh (Patna) the occurrence of different species of waders of Patna District - some sight records, and others live birds brought to him by bird catchers. Mr. D'Abreu has listed all the birds mentioned

by me above besides Whimbrel, Bartailed Godwit, Avocet, Eastern Broadbilled Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, and Common Snipe. As he lived near the bird catchers' place in Gulzarbagh and very near the Ganges, he met with greater success than myself. As Patna is on the river route connecting the seafront it is possible that waders favouring marine haunts straggle inland along this route.

P.K. Sen Gupta

METHOD OF COLLECTION OF NEST-MATERIAL BY SWIFTS

Mrs. Usha Ganguli has asked in the Newsletter for April 1962 for definite information on the subject of collection of nest-material by swifts. Where and how does the swift, which ordinarily does not descend to the ground, collect the feathers, grass, and straw for its nest? Is it possible for the bird to collect nest-material while flying as fast as it does?

Stuart Baker states that the nest of the common swift is made of feathers and all sorts of wind-borne rubbish. According to Douglas Dewar, at nest building time the House Swift will eagerly seize anything floating in the air. Dr. David Lack in his most interesting book SWIFTS IN A TOWER states that the common swift normally collects all its nest-material on the wing. Hence nest building occurs irregularly, being most frequent when there is enough wind to carry material up into the air.

In collecting nest-material, swifts are great opportunists, using whatever happens to be common. Dr. Lack, watching a colony of swifts, found a swift entering its nest with a pigeon's feather in its bill just after two pigeons had fought on the roof overhead. He also knew when a certain grass field near the nesting colony was being cut, the birds were soon bringing hay for their nests. In the Andaman Islands one species of swiftlet used once a month to bring in human hair after the convicts' regulation haircut. During the war, in Europe, some of the nests of the swift were built of the shreds of tinfoil dropped by the R.A.F. to confuse enemy radar.

The North American Chimney Swift, which builds its nest with twigs, also collects them on the wing. But since twigs are not normally airborne, the chimney swift dives towards the top branches of a tree and snaps off small twigs with its toes as it passes.

It is clear from what has been written above that swifts can

and do collect nest-material on the wing. Notwithstanding we decided to perform an experiment to confirm it. The house swift builds a large number of nests under the arches of the corridors of the Forest Research Institute building in Dehra Dun. The nests are constructed mostly of grey feathers, with an occasional blue or green feather. Some time back we thought that if we were periodically to scatter feathers dyed in various colours from a tower of the Institute building, the swifts would build multi-coloured nests instead of the usual grey ones. This experiment was, however, not carried out. Now that the question of the method of collection of nest-material by swifts has been raised, we have carried out a part of the experiment.

A handful of small chicken feathers (maximum length 4 inches) were dyed a bright pink. On a breezy day in August when swifts were flying about the Institute building, the feathers were scattered in the air from a tower, a few at a time. As soon as the first few feathers floated away, the swifts rushed towards them and tried to catch them in their mouths. Some times they were successful but more often not. As many as four or five birds sometimes tried one after another to take a feather, but failed. Some times a feather caught by a bird would fall from its bill and would again be caught by the same bird after one, two, or even three attempts. Some of the birds which were successful in catching feathers immediately flew off to different parts of the building. Others flew about, with the feathers held across their beak, apparently trying to collect more feathers.

Visiting the nesting sites immediately afterwards it was possible to see the birds sticking the freshly captured pink feathers to their nests under construction.

This experiment was repeated three times during the day and again on a subsequent day. Every time, swifts were seen taking the floating feathers. The number of feathers recovered by the birds was small. We shall have to scatter great quantities of feathers if we want nests to be built mostly of feathers supplied by us. While discussing the result of this experiment with General Williams, he suggested that if the birds could catch every feather they aimed at, insects on which they fed would have little chance of survival.

Visitors to the Forest Research Institute should be able to see the pink feathers in the nests of the swifts under the arches along the corridors of the building.

K.M. Vaid
(Forest Research Inst., Dehra Dun)
Joseph George
(Central Building Res. Inst., Roorkee)

STUDIES ON THE EFFECTS OF DDT ON BIRDS*

The widespread use of agricultural chemicals for the control of pests in the United States has created a number of problems regarding the effects of these pesticides on other than the intended target organisms.

It is estimated that there are more than 200 basic pesticides in existence which are produced in over 10,000 forms and formulations. The United States Department of Agriculture estimates that more than a million tons of pesticides are applied annually to over 100 million areas of land, and the trend is towards increase usage of these substances.

The extensive use of these poisons makes it imperative that studies be conducted to determine their effects not only on the pests against which they are used, but also on all animals with which they come into intimate contact.

Our own research has been concerned largely with the effects on birds of spraying the chlorinated hydrocarbon DDT (1, 1, 1-trichloro-2, 2-bis (p-chlorophenyl)-ethane) on elm trees for the purpose of controlling Dutch elm disease.

Dutch elm disease is produced by the action of a fungus (Ceratocystis ulmi) which invades the water-conducting vessels of the tree. The fungus causes mechanical clogging and secretes poisons which eventually cause the branches to wilt and the tree to die. The disease is spread from diseased to healthy trees by elm bark beetles. Attempts to control Dutch elm disease involve both sanitation and the suppression of the beetle vectors which introduce the fungus during the time of feeding. Spraying elms with DDT is carried out in order to kill the beetles before feeding takes place.

In spite of the use of DDT, Dutch elm disease has spread into more than 20 states since the introduction of the fungus from Europe in 1930.

Early studies of the toxicity of DDT to wildlife by biologists of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicated that the dosages recommended for use on elms would be lethal to birds. Further studies in New Jersey beginning in 1947 also indicated that mortality to birds was to be expected in Dutch elm disease control programs.

In spite of this, the use of DDT for possible control of Dutch elm disease has been greatly expanded, especially in the Middle

*Data in part from Bull. 41, Bird Mortality in the Dutch Elm Disease Program, Cranbrook Inst. of Sci., Bloomfield Hills, Mich., 1961.

West. As a result, about 60 different communities have reported the loss of Robins (Turdus migratorius) and some 90 other species of birds following the application of DDT to the elms. Many of the birds found dying showed characteristic tremors and convulsions which are associated with chlorinated hydrocarbon poisoning.

Dr. Roy Barker, in studies at the University of Illinois, traced the poisoning of Robins to earthworms which feed on contaminated leaves after they fall to the ground. He demonstrated that earthworms have a high resistance to DDT and can store large quantities of the poison in their tissues without being affected themselves. By this means, the worms concentrate the DDT in their tissues and serve as a source of highly contaminated food to Robins and other birds that feed upon them.

In 1955 (the year after spraying for Dutch elm disease began) a considerable number of birds (particularly Robins) were observed or reported dying on the campus of Michigan State University at East Lansing.

Studies conducted in 1954 had shown that the campus supported an estimated pre-spraying population of at least one pair of Robins per acre over a 184-acre study area. By the end of June, 1957, the population of Robins had dwindled to a few scattered adults and one young. In 1958, small waves of Robins invaded the campus in April and May, but these died or disappeared by the end of June. In 1959 about ten pairs of Robins were recorded on the campus in mid-April, but by the end of June, 45 dead Robins had been reported or collected from the same area. In 1960, a mid-April population of about 18 pairs of Robins declined rapidly in late April and May, until only three were known to be left by May 22. During the same year, ten of 12 nests located in our study area were abandoned during incubation or building due to the death of the adults, while the remaining two produced a total of four young in an area once believed capable of producing over 700 young.

Unfortunately, a number of similar reports were either ignored or discounted by operators and administrators of the program, due in part to a so-called failure to verify the cause of death. For this reason, facilities were set up for the purpose of analyzing dead or dying birds in order to determine whether or not their tissues contained DDT.

To date 216 birds (100 Robins and 116 other birds representing 48 species), recovered from sprayed areas, have been analyzed. Of the total, 80 were observed or reported dying with tremors, and others were found dead. An additional 90 birds (8 Robins and

52 House Sparrows, Passer domesticus) were experimentally fed DDT in the laboratory and also analyzed.

In most cases, the brain, liver, heart, and breast muscle of each bird were analyzed separately. The testes of 23 male Robins were also checked for DDT, as were the eggs within the uteri of female Robins and eggs from deserted nests.

Results from the analysis of Robins found dead or dying in areas sprayed with DDT, when compared with experimentally poisoned birds, showed that nearly 90 per cent had sufficient quantities of DDT in the brain to justify the conclusion that they were killed by the poison. In all cases, Robins found trembling in sprayed areas had DDT residues in their tissues, while only two of the birds found dead were completely free of it in all of the tissues tested. It appears, at least in Robins that it is unlikely that a bird could live for long in an area sprayed with DDT without accumulating at least some of the toxicant.

DDT was also found in the female reproductive organs and in unhatched eggs, as well as in young birds. What effects the poison may have on development of eggs, hatchability, and nestling survival is still largely unknown. The data from our study indicate that DDT may be passed on directly from the female to the eggs and young. In addition DDT was also found in the testes of 19 out of 23 male Robins analyzed.

Although the Robin is the most conspicuous victim in our study area, some 75 other birds, representing 37 species, were also found to contain at least some DDT in their tissues.

The results from feeding tests indicate that experimentally poisoned birds develop tremors comparable to those observed in birds dying in the field and that levels of DDT recovered in their tissues (particularly the brain) compare closely to the levels of DDT found in field-recovered birds.

The results of the feeding tests also show that birds maintained on low DDT diets or exposed to higher dosages for short periods of time are either able to eliminate the toxicant or redistribute it to more passive sites. However, DDT stored in fat depots is cumulative and may be less subject to breakdown or elimination. The storage of DDT in fat tissues, even at high levels, apparently does not poison birds directly, but serves as a storage depot. However, when the fat reserves are utilized (as in starvation), the stored DDT may be released to more sensitive areas (such as the brain) resulting in tremors followed by death. Theoretically, some birds might retain sublethal amounts of DDT in fat all summer and perish in

winter or during migration when fats are utilized.

From the data presented in this report, it is evident that the use of DDT in the control of Dutch elm disease has resulted in the loss of numerous birds. Our studies, mostly limited to a University campus, represent only a small fraction of the total number of birds which have been killed since the introduction of DDT. Several other investigators have documented similar losses of not only birds but also of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and beneficial insects. If we stop to consider that Dutch elm disease is only one of the numerous spray programs now being conducted, and also take into consideration that DDT is one of the least toxic of the chemicals now in use, it becomes apparent that the increasing use of chemical pesticides may well represent one of the greatest threats to which our wildlife has yet been exposed.

It is not our contention that moderate amounts of sprays should not be used, but, rather, that any program designed to spray broad spectrum insecticides over large tracts of land or forests should be viewed in terms of its effects on the ecology of an area and not in terms of a few species of insects alone. There is no doubt that insecticides have increased crop production, reduced human and animal diseases, and effected other improvements. However, the benefits derived from one program or one insecticide or even hundreds of them does not necessarily condone the use of the same poison or poisons in all programs. The only sound policy that can be used is the evaluation of each program individually in terms of total effect.

Richard F. Bernard
and
J. Wallace

[In the October issue of the Newsletter the resolutions of the International Committee for Bird Preservation in respect of dangers of the indiscriminate use of insecticides on birds were reproduced. This is a matter of highest importance to us in India also now that agricultural operations are being modernized, and a whole lot of chemicals are being advertised to deal death to insects. The above article shows how important it is to be sparing in the use of these wonder drugs. - ED.]

FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF THE COMMON AND STRIATED BABBLERS

The Common Babbler (Turdoides caudata) occurs throughout India, but in the Indo-Gangetic Plain is another species, the Striated Babbler (Turdoides earlei), which it closely resembles and with which it may be confused. Both birds travel in parties.

Three criteria are useful in distinguishing the species: voice, habitat, and colour of the throat.

The Common Babbler usually occurs in rather open areas, in thorn or scrub forest. It is a skulking bird that has a strong preference for the ground, and does not fly much unless disturbed. The Striated Babbler, however, is only rarely found away from marshy reedbeds and moist riverside situations. It freely climbs about cattail stalks, flies often, and is not skulking. I have, however, seen a party of Striated Babblers some distance from water, in an area more usually frequented by the Common Babbler.

The calls are distinctive and at once serve to identify the species. The Common Babbler's call is a long bubbling whistle on a descending scale, with variations to fit the situation. The Striated Babbler's call is a loud, pleasant series of cheer, cheer, cheer -- each cheer ends lower than it starts. When excited, the birds create quite a commotion. Again, the volume and frequency of the calls depends on the current situation. In general I believe the Striated Babbler tends to call more frequently than the Common Babbler.

These two characters alone are sufficient to identify the birds but, at close range, it can be seen that the Common Babbler has a white throat, where the Striated Babbler has a dark throat with faint streaks -- the throat colour contrasts less sharply with the colour of the back than in the Common Babbler.

The Striated Babbler is slightly larger than the Common, and the tail is lighter in colour than the back. When the bird is landing this can easily be seen. The tail of the Common is the same colour as the back. Both birds are brown above with heavy streaks, but the Striated is light brown below, where the Common may be nearly white.

The Striated Babbler, then, is a marsh bird of slightly larger size, has a dark throat, is more nearly uniform in colour but with a light tail, and has a distinctive call that resembles one of the Tailor Bird's calls, except that it is more mellow and lower-pitched.

Julian P. Donahue

NOTES AND COMMENTS

One of the problems which field workers face in India is to evolve traps for catching birds of different types. Mist Nets seem to be the most efficient method but traps of various kinds are also necessary. We reproduce a note sent to us by Robert Spencer, of the Bird Ringing Committee, British Museum, London, whose letter is published in the Correspondence section.

Notes on Swedish Lander Trap : Ottenby Trap

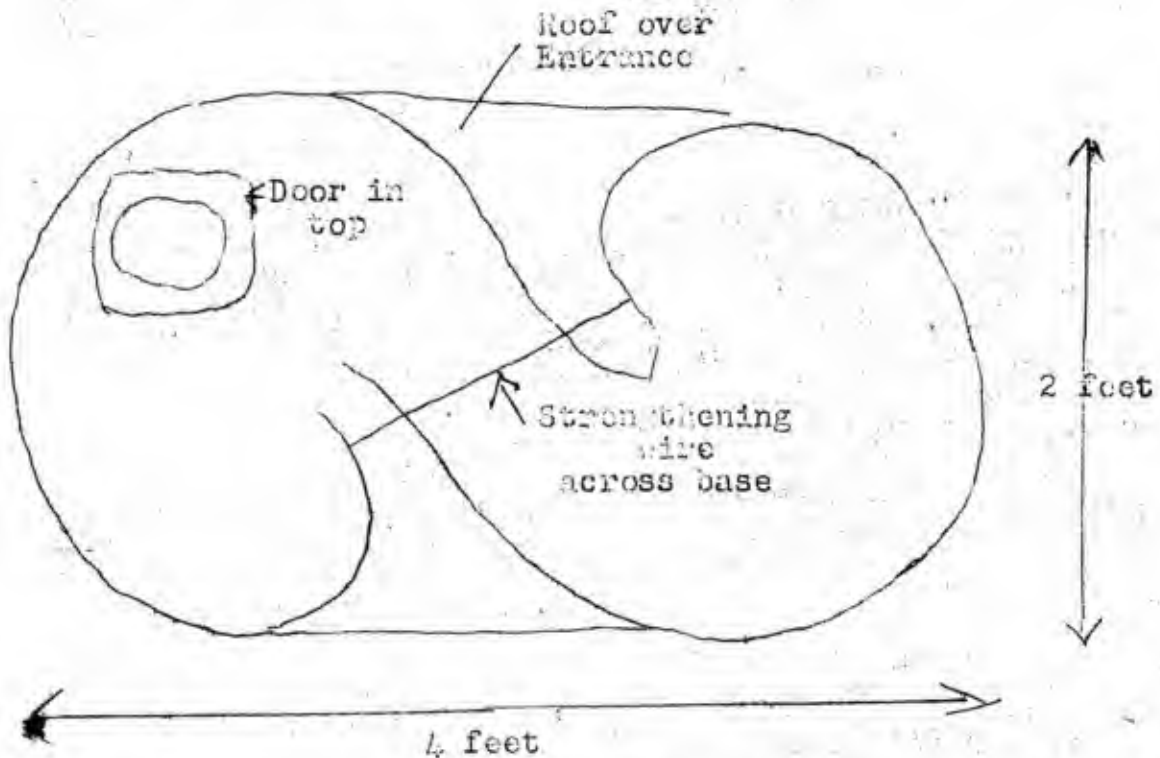
Although designed for catching landers, the Ottenby trap has proved very effective against a wide variety of species. Much valuable pioneer work has been carried out at Monks' House B.C., and the encouraging results obtained there led to the employment of twelve traps at Romford sewage farm. In the past nine months these twelve traps have taken over 1000 birds including about 700 Meadow Pipits, 200 wagtails (Pied and Yellow), 50 Skylarks, 20 Snipe, 11 Jack Snipe and 5 Common Sandpipers. They are most effective against ground-feeding species, but have taken a good many warblers, chats, and even two Redstarts.

Design and Construction. The design employed at Romford follows the Monks' House pattern in having continuous curves instead of the rectangular construction illustrated in Trapping Methods for Bird Ringers. It has been found that a hole in the top is the simplest method of removing birds. Three-fourths inch wire mesh is used throughout, and a really heavy gauge wire is used for the base. This helps to ensure that the trap retains its shape when carried from place to place, and facilitates bedding down on broken surfaces, by working the trap to and fro. The corner between the two compartments should be at least 8" or 9" wide, the entrances are usually 2"-2½" at ground level, but may taper so that the walls meet at the roof.

A 7 ft. 6 in. strip of 36" mesh can be bisected to form 18" walls of a trap measuring about 2' x 4'. The base wire should be 3"-4" shorter than this (i.e. 7' 3") and is best shaped on a jig if many traps are to be built. If 36" wide mesh is used for the roof the surplus strip of ca. 12" makes a useful guide wall.

Baiting and Baiting - obviously depend on the species to be caught. At Romford efforts have been concentrated on pipits, etc. and the traps are generally set on recently ploughed earth, the surface being raked over periodically to uncover larvae etc. In such circumstances baiting is probably unnecessary. The use of bread usually attracts Starlings which frighten away the

quieter species. For waders the traps are sited in marshy places, sometimes straddling the edge of a shallow pool. Wherever there is a sufficiently large concentration of birds the traps are most productively used in pairs coupled by guide walls. ,



from Ringers' Bulletin No. 1,
1956
(now out of print)

CORRESPONDENCE

Speed of Birds

I was interested in Mr. Joseph George's paper on 'Speed of flight of birds' (August issue). I might adduce that on 27 December 1961, in Delhi, I clocked a Ring Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) as cruising with a ground speed of 35 m.p.h. The timing device was a moving car.

Julian P. Donahue

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Pintheaded Duck

I want to suggest that a thorough search should be made for the Pintheaded Duck (*Shodonessa caryophyllacea*) in Bihar in the districts of Darbhanga, Samarsa and Purnea. Recently, I visited an interior village in Darbhanga District where some old people told me that there is a possibility of finding this bird if a thorough search were made in the areas of these districts which are swampy and flooded every year by the waters of the Kosi River. It is quite possible that in some remote corner of these districts the bird may still survive but it may not come into light because people who visit those areas do not know that the bird is so rare and those who know seldom visit those remote places. I have great hope that a thorough search may be successful.

Kameshwar Prasad Singh, Dist. Purnea.

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Rosy Pastors in Delhi

On July 27, a party of about a dozen Rosy Pastors visited my neighbour's neem tree. Their incessant twitterings attracted my attention. About half of them were juveniles in pink-brown plumage. They were feeding on the small ripe fruit of the neem tree. With them were two birds that looked like Blackthroated Thrush without the black throat! I noticed a faint gorget of brown streaks on the upper breast. Could these be juvenile Turdus atrogularis?

The Rosy Pastors visited the garden again on the 28th and 29th but on the latter date the number had dwindled to two - an adult male and a juvenile.

On August 6 on a visit to Rajalgarh, we saw a few feeding on the ground about four miles north of the Jheel, about 20 miles S.W. of New Delhi. Julian Donahue reported seeing several small flocks over the ridge in a northerly direction on Monday August 20.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

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About our Newsletter

I find the Newsletter an admirable little publication, and would like to congratulate all concerned. It is refreshingly informal, as a newsletter should be, and not the least stimulating feature of it is the frequency with which the question mark appears. The first stage in the quest for knowledge is to

pose the right question!

Although Europe and India are far apart, we have a good many species in common, and hence common interests. My own work is devoted mainly to bird migration and ringing, and I have particularly appreciated such articles as that on the Greenish Warbler in the March issue of the Newsletter, and Dr. Salim Ali's fascinating comments on migration through the Himalayas. Here, indeed, is a challenge. My own attention had already been focused on the interesting migration of the Tuft (Philomachus pugnax) which breeds across northern Europe and Asia. Tuft ringed in England and Denmark have been recovered as far as 120° E. at Yakutsk and Okhotsk in the breeding season, and must therefore have performed very long west to east migrations across the entire width of the Eurasian land mass. To what extent are the Himalayas a barrier to the hundreds of thousands of waders breeding in the Arctic between the Yenisei and the Lena rivers? Ringed waders have a surprisingly high recovery rate, and any ringing in India might help to solve some of these problems.

I was most impressed with the work on flava wagtails as reported by Mr. I.V. George in the April issue. The taxonomy of these wagtails has been revised several times in recent years, but we still seem far from an agreed solution. A series of breeding season recoveries of flava wagtails caught on the Indian wintering grounds could provide the key to the situation, especially if they could be identified subspecifically.

I was particularly pleased to note that the wagtails were weighed, and would like to suggest that this is one of the really important contributions Indian bird-ringers can make. More and more we are coming to realise the significance of bird weights in migration studies, and a good series of winter weights of Palearctic migrants in India could prove invaluable. Equally helpful would be a study of the timing and sequence of moult for those northern species which moult in their winter quarters in India. The ringing of small passerines produces relatively few recoveries - as most ringers know to their cost. Studies of seasonal and diurnal weight variation, of plumage variation, and of moult, mean that something of value can be learnt from every bird handled, regardless of whether it is eventually recovered.

Finally, I would like to comment on the excellent news that there are to be C.S.I.R. grants for post-graduate field research in ornithology. This is a fine step forward, and should greatly benefit in ornithology. Even so, we can never hope to have enough professional ornithologists, and there will be work for the keen amateurs to perform for as far ahead as one can foresee.

Robert Spencer,
Ringing Officer, Bird Ringing Committee
British Trust for Ornithology, London

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FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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HOW BIRDS ARE NAMED AND CLASSIFIED

It is impossible to speak or to write of the objects of any study unless they are named. Hence there is no need to explain the importance of giving names to each and every organism. An arrangement of the named myriad forms of animals is the next step. In a library books can be arranged either according to the alphabetical order of author's name or of subject or chronologically. Likewise the arrangement (classification) of animals could be done in different ways. An easy reference is the benefit of such a method. The system and at present the grouping of animals is based on natural relationship. That part of biological sciences which deals with the naming (nomenclature) and arranging (classification) of organisms is known as Systematics or Taxonomy. The object of classification is to bring together those that have natural affinities and to separate those that are not.

For amateurs the scientific names of animals which always consist of two words, the seemingly complicated series of hierarchies in which they are arranged, the rules and regulations that govern such procedures are sometimes difficult to understand. I shall try to give a bird's eye view of the subject in the following lines.

Major Categories

The six universally accepted categories in descending order of rank are: Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, and Species. Birds constitute the class Aves and come under the Phylum Chordata (which includes all vertebrates and those which possess a notochord).

Species

Species (plural and singular spelt the same) are the bricks by which the castle of classification is built. No one can hope to become an ornithologist without being able to recognize the species of birds. Correct identification is the prerequisite for

field study of birds.

Zoological species has been defined as groups of actually (or potentially) interbreeding natural populations which are reproductively isolated from other such groups.

Species are distinguished by a group of characters known as 'taxonomical characters'. A taxonomic character is an inherent property of any one group which is generally not shared by any other groups. In avian systematics commonly used taxonomic characters for species are mostly morphological. They may be colour pattern, size, shape, etc. General behavioural pattern, ecological (relationship of animal with environment) specialities, reproductive traits (type of nest, breeding activities, etc.) are also used as taxonomical characters, wherever these characters are worked out. As far as Indian birds are concerned these are the least known.

In many parts of India the House Crow (Corvus splendens) and the Jungle Crow (Corvus macrorhynchus) co-exist in the same areas. This occurring together is called sympatry and the species involved sympatric species. Conversely those species which live in different geographical areas are termed allopatric species. The Yellowthroated Bulbul (Pycnonotus xantholaemus) and the Striated Green Bulbul (Pycnonotus striatus) provide a good example. The former is found only in peninsular India while the latter in the north-eastern India. Such a distribution is known as allopatric distribution.

It is now known that birds which inhabit humid regions generally possess a brilliant plumage and those which live in dry areas have a rather duller coloration. Suppose the population of a species was spread over both a humid and a desert type of region. What would be the expected outcome? That part of the population which lived in the humid area would normally tend to develop brilliant plumage, and the desert population would tend to have duller plumage. This character in combination with other characters in due course may develop sufficiently so as to split the original population into two distinct populations, i.e. the desert type and the humid type. Such local differences within a species, when they become sufficiently distinct for a variable combination of characters is called a subspecies. Adjacent subspecies of a species may interbreed, that they are capable of doing so when they meet in the overlapping area. In other words the subspecies of a species is not reproductively isolated even though each has its own combination of characters which distinguish it. When the subspecies in course of time attain reproductive isolation they become a species, so that subspecies are really incipient species.

One species may possess one or more subspecies and are known as monotypic and polytypic species respectively.

Higher Categories above Species

Like species are classified under one genus, like genera under one family, like families under one order, and so on. Similar and related species presumably of common evolutionary (phylogenetic) origin are classified under the unit Genus (genera, plural). The genus may contain one or more species and is known as monotypic and polytypic genera respectively.

The families of birds are often classified according to rather and sometimes not very clear distinctions, such as variation in bill length, arrangement of scales (scutellation) on tarsus, number and comparative lengths of primaries, etc. Family names are often converted for convenient usage into anglicized terms such as 'Sylviids' for the group of warblers, 'Laniids' for shrikes, etc. Such designations are more accurate descriptions and are preferred to common names like warblers or shrikes.

The order includes those which exhibit similarities in bone structure and other parts of the anatomy, while the family for instance is often confined in its distribution to a continent or a neighbouring continent, and an order is often world-wide in distribution. By convention the names of all the families of animals have standardized endings, namely '-idae'.

According to Wetmore's (1951) Revised Classification, 34 orders of birds are currently recognized, 24 orders of living birds and 7 others known only from fossil or extinct birds. Of the estimated 8600 species of birds (30,000 forms including species and subspecies) that inhabit the face of the globe, the Indian sub-region (India, Pakistan, Ceylon, and Nepal) can claim familiarity with about 1200 species (over 2000 forms including species and subspecies). It has one of the richest and most varied fauna in the world.

(To be continued)

P.V. George, M.Sc.
Research Training Scholar
Bird Section, Zoological Survey of India
Calcutta

BIRD SONGS AND CALLS AS A MEANS TO BIRD RECOGNITION

Bird songs and calls are singularly difficult to translate either into words or into musical notations (except in rare instances).

In Britain and Europe the songs and calls of a large number of birds have been tape recorded, and birdwatchers are made familiar with them through the B.B.C. and long-playing records. In Cornell Library of Natural Sounds (Laboratory of Ornithology, Sapsucker Woods, Ithaca, New York)* there are recordings of 1250 species of birds from different parts of the world out of a total of 8600 species. Songs and calls of 305 species in two long-playing records are available as a supplement to Peterson's FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF N. AMERICA.

In India no such facilities are available although we are rich in bird population and some of our songsters like the Shama, Magpie-Robin, Greywinged Blackbird, Himalayan Whistling Thrush are endowed with a repertoire of beautiful songs.

Birds, unlike mammals, communicate by visual and vocal signals. Vocal signals may be songs and calls. Songs are mainly heard during the breeding season. By 'Song' we generally mean a call which is sustained long enough to be like a phrase and which is melodious to our ears. Of course, a song may sound unmusical to us but it will still be a song, like the booming cry of the Crow-Pheasant. The function of a song is: (1) to hold and defend territory; (2) to advertise the presence of the singer to help him secure a mate.

A 'territory' is an area which a male bird defends against intrusions from other males of the same species and in which he generally brings up the young ones. When a male takes up an area, he sings from different points along that area, thereby laying on a kind of invisible boundary within which he allows no intrusion. A female of the same species, hearing the song may approach the territory, and if both birds are in full breeding condition he generally accepts her and the young ones are reared within their domain. The urge to defend a territory is very strong in the male and he is most vociferous during this period. Compared with the lasting quality of scent whereby mammals convey messages, a bird song lasts but a short while; hence the song has to be repeated often to be effective.

*National Geographic Society, April 1962

Apart from songs, most birds have various other calls. Calls are generally of shorter duration and are uttered to register different emotions. The most important is the warning or alarm call which is understood by all birds. Birds have many enemies. When faced with danger an alarm call by a single bird is the signal for flight for the whole flock. The intimidation call is usually uttered by some birds during the breeding season in defence of nests or their young ones. Gregarious birds utter 'keep-together' calls when out foraging. These calls which are repeated at short intervals help to keep the flock together. Babblers, White-eyes and Redheaded Tits have flock calls.

Some birds use roosting calls when they gather to roost in the evening. 'Change-over' calls are used by nesting pairs to relieve each other when they take turns during incubation. The calls of young birds are different from those of adults. They have special calls when they are hungry, or when they are being fed. With practised ears one can hear fledgling Hoopoes, Kools, Crows, and Kites being fed without going out of the house.

In Delhi, the Sunbirds, Bulbuls, Tailor Birds, Ashy Wren Warbler, Little Minivets, Common Wood-Shrikes, Crow-Pheasants, etc. call throughout the year but not with equal frequency during every season. The Indian Robin begins to sing from the end of January. The end of March to the beginning of April is the period in which the Magpie-Robin breaks into his rapturous song. (In winter he has a harsh call with an occasional pleasant note.) The White-eye which in all seasons has the sibilant flock-call, begins to sing his sweet monotonous love song in the early mornings of April and May. The breeding season is the best time for the bird watcher to learn the songs. The greatest variety of birds sing during this period and their songs are repeated day after day over a long period.

In summer, the breeding population of resident birds is augmented by our few summer visitors. The Hawk Cuckoo (Brain Fever Bird) and the Koel arrive about the first week of March but do not sing in earnest till April. The beautiful Golden Oriole heralds his presence by his flute-like call in the beginning of April. The Rosy Pastors, passage migrants here on the way to central Asia, stop with us for a few weeks in April during which Silk Cotton, Salvadora, or Ficus trees are alive with their twittering calls. Early in June, we hear the metallic call of the Pied Crested Cuckoo, the harbinger of the monsoon. Blyth's Reed Warbler, a winter visitor from across the Himalayas, sings for a few weeks before he returns to the northern coolness by the end of May.

Some of our winter visitors, Geese, duck and waders, have specific calls. Geese call frequently. The bell-like tlu tlu tlu of

the Greenshank, the cheeank of the Whitetailed Lapwing, the distinctive calls of the Snipe, the Stilt, and the other waders when disturbed are familiar sounds of the waterside.

Attracted by an unfamiliar bird call once, I went out to investigate and saw some Roseringed Parakeets mobbing and fluttering over a three-foot monitor lizard (Varanus monitor) all the while uttering a harsh noise. This intimidation call was new to me. The alarm calls of birds are the easiest to learn, and investigation in most cases leads to the cause of the alarm. I once saw a tiny hare being dragged by the ears by a Crow-Pheasant! The hare's cry and Jungle Babblers giving the alarm call drew my attention to the tragedy.

Owls and Nightjars are nocturnal birds. It is only by their distinctive calls that different species can be identified in the field with certainty.

A good ear is an essential in bird watching as a quick eye and an experienced birdwatcher takes advantage of both his eyes and ears.

(Mrs.) Usha Ganguli

BIRD WATCHING IN THE HIMALAYAS

Everything about the Himalayas has to be said in superlatives, and I do feel that though the bird life of this great mountain range is a medley of colourful species in a remarkably wide specific spectrum only to be produced by compressing so vast a longitudinal arch of climate and vegetation as from the tropics to the poles into a few confused and tumultuous miles, the charm of bird watching in the Himalayas is greatly enhanced by the grandeur of the surroundings in which it is done. But then this is true about almost everything done here and even the mere act of existence is raised above a mundane plane when pursued in the 'Abode of Gods'.

Mountain birds are interesting in their altitudinal ranges and these more often than not are very closely linked with the type of vegetation zones a person might pass through. Of course man has made uniform spread of certain species across several thousands of feet of contours by his altering nature's scheme through clearing of forests for agriculture and pasturages and many species now have become closely associated with this unnatural biotope, others have restricted their ranges.

It might at first ~~through~~ seem helpful to talk about Himalayan

avifauna in altitudinal zonations, but this would not be as simple as bird societies being associated with vegetation, have rather an ununiform range as the belts rise and fall according to a variety of factors - an East to West position along the mountain axis; aspect of the mountain slope to sun and winds; proximity to the icefields and glaciers, etc. Bird life therefore cannot be neatly demarcated by contour lines. I think the correct approach is to differentiate between the vegetation types themselves and then have a look at the faunal communities residing in them. I should, however, like to qualify myself by saying that what I have to say is based solely on my experience of the Garhwal and the Simla hills. I have not had any opportunity of visiting the richer areas further East where the numbers of species increase perplexingly. However, the birds of the Western Himalayas provide a firm base from which a visit to the Eastern Himalayas would not leave the bird watcher dazzled.

The western species are all represented in the East and help as introductions to their many cousins which inhabit the dense rain forests of Darjeeling and Sikkim. Yet even the relatively poorer Western Himalayas have many new and interesting forms of bird life to offer, and there are types both of the Palearctic and the exotic Oriental regions represented here.

Now to get on to analyse the vegetation types. The motor road, or for that matter, the railway from Kalka to Simla, provides excellent opportunities of getting familiar with altering plant life. At Kalka, the mountains rise abruptly from the broad plain of north India and boulder-choked torrents debouch from the narrow confines of deep ravines and contain trickles of clear water flowing round boulders and into green pools dimpled by fish fry and shaded by spreading banyans. The mountainsides rise steeply and are hot and uninviting in summer. They are generally covered by tangled masses of scrub and climbers, bamboos in feathery clumps and where not felled, or where under active preservation, the foothills are clad by semi-deciduous monsoon forests of sal and other tropical trees.

In summer, when most people pass through on their way to the cooler heights, the vegetation is at its seasonal poorest; most of the leaves are shed and lying in wind blown rifts among the trees. The only shade is that of banyans and giant sized mangoes and peepals, not tampered with by humans because of their religious significance or the fruit they give. This shade is dark and invitingly cool and here throng all, or what might seem to be all, the birds of the vicinity. These are not different from those of the nearby plains. The deciduous forests, with their shady banyans and mango occupy the beds of the larger valleys far into the mountains, though wherever these widen the natural

vegetation is cleared to give place to broadly terraced fields enclosed by euphorbia hedges. In summer these fields are parched and await the monsoon rains to quench their thirst when they give forth yields of rice, millets, and vegetables. However side torrents led into irrigation ditches provide oases of lush farm tracts with summer rice, bananas, and mangoes - larger and shadier than ever.

Up to 3000 ft. or even higher in the broader valleys, the birds seen are all familiar: Black Drongos, Brown Doves, Common Mynas, Munias, Franklin's Wren Warblers, Purple Sunbirds (the males still in breeding finery), Coucals sedately stalking the hedge-rows, Roseringed Parakeets, and Green Bee-eaters. Flocks of squealing Jungle Babblers rummage among fallen leaves and sweet voiced Dhayals sing from exposed perches. Golden Orioles are heard on all sides, their musical calls as charming to the ear as their flashing yellow and black livories are to the eyes. Paradise Flycatchers are particularly plentiful in Himalayan valleys and the lovely, milky white males with their improbably long white tail streamers are a very common sight. Redvented Bulbuls chortling in Ficus trees, vie for figs with the very ubiquitous Coppersmith and flocks of Brahminy and Jungle Mynas. The last mentioned myna might well be overlooked as a Common Myna, but the lack of yellow skin patches round the eyes and the presence of a tuft of feathers above the beak indicate the difference. Blossomheaded Parakeets, the males of which have a pretty plumb-coloured head, are common though soon to be replaced higher up by another close relative. Everything is in fact familiar to the plains dweller!

In forest country, Spotted Doves are plentiful with chess-board patterns of black and white dots on the sides of their necks, but otherwise resembling little Brown Doves in build. A solitary and large Black Drongo will be observed in lower branches of trees and should be investigated for it will be recognized as the Hair-crested Drongo with a broad spatulate tail. Scurrying among the undergrowth and often very confiding are Red Spurfowl very like small, brown chicken.

From above 3000 ft. and up to 6000 large tracts are clothed by cheer pine forests. This conifer is a very typical tree of the middle heights and forms almost pure stands. The trees permit plenty of sunlight and cheer forests are rather hot and dry. In the water courses, however, broad leaved trees provide a restful shade.

Above the cheer slopes are the sub-tropical forests of oak, tree rhododendrons with often impenetrable thickets of ringal cane.

Much of this zone is extensively cultivated and entire mountain sides are diligently built into terrace fields. It is surprising how treeless some parts of the Himalayas are at this height, but there is considerable brushwood in the gullies, and a familiar sight and quite depressing too are badly defoliated oaks standing gaunt against the sky. Cultivation extends up to 8000 ft. above which in the Western Himalayas, the winters are too long for agriculture although potato patches are being extended higher into the funeral coniferous forests which so far are largely extant.

The ecological belts of the Himalayas above the tropical valley can thus be classified as follows:

- a. Cultivation, largely below 8000 ft. and excluding the potato fields which are in the coniferous belt;
- b. The sub-tropical forests of broad-leaved trees and/or mainly cheer pine forests;
- c. Warm temperate belt, excluding cultivation, which can be oak and other broad-leaved deciduous trees, or mixed with conifers - a fine area for birds, or in drier parts, pure stands of Deodar, or some other conifer;
- d. The cold temperate forests of high oak, and coniferous-like spruce and fir with the rhododendron border along the tree-line.

Beyond the trees and shrubs, is a lovely altitudinal zone, a horticulturist's paradise. The alpine meadows would by a longitudinal analogy represent the tundra expanses of the cold arctic. In May there is still much snow around and only the earliest of annuals have braved the cold. These form drifts of purple, and small yellow potentillas paint entire mountain sides in a warm welcome to newly arrived migrants from their winter haunts. July and August are the peak months for mountain flora and these meadows stretching up to 14,000 ft. or higher are lush pastures for flocks of sheep and cattle which are driven up from hamlets lower down.

The mountains then soar on into ethereal heights; bare rocks glisten with many tinted lichen and tight tufts of hardy saxifrages. These last few plants fail and the elemental world of savage rock, glistening ice, and snow, and raging winds lies on the doorstep of space, across which only man has stepped to carry the challenge of life beyond the limits of its planetary domain.

(To be continued)

K.S. Lavkumar

A VISIT TO NAJAFGADH JHEEL : 21 October 1962

This visit has been a very rewarding one for I had the opportunity of meeting Mrs. Ganguli, Capt. Tyabji, and Mr. Lavkumar in the field.

On this very first visit to that enormous jheel I added three birds to my life list, viz. the Little Pratincole, the Black-tailed Godwit, and the Whitetailed Lapwing. The Pratincole was the tough nut of the day. I dare say we could not have identified it because it was resting amongst the ducks, were it not for the telescope.

During the short excursion, we saw plenty of Bluecheeked Green Bee-eaters. We had also the good fortune to see a single starling, the first of the season.

We walked quite a lot in the hope of seeing the flamingos, but were disappointed. Then with the sun a little behind us we mounted Mrs. Ganguli's 20 magnification telescope and started looking for novelties! It was thrilling to see through the high powered lens and one felt one could almost touch the birds! There were quite a few rafts of duck scattered all over the jheel and in the distance we could see larger and larger flocks of coots and Garganey Teal. There were also Wigeons, Shovellers, and Nukhtas. The coots made tremendous splashing noises when they were taking off which was very frequent, for a Marsh Harrier was disturbing them.

The Lesser Sand Plover was the second tough nut for us to crack. Mr. Lavkumar spotted three of them among a flock of Little Stints. We ascertained the identification beyond all doubt.

We were moved by the spectacular flighting of the Little Stints. For one moment they would be grey and the other white streamlined bodies. We wondered what made them turn so quickly and simultaneously. We could not find any suitable answer but thought that there could be some sound signal arrangement. However, we could not help admiring them for their grace and elegance of movement for quite a long time.

Light was fading away but the sun was casting an orange glow on the water and flocks after flocks of duck were trooping in from the west. One can hardly blame Peter Scott for having the tremendous love he has for the duck. One can become an admirer of them in no time at all. We returned to Delhi and called it a day.

Anwar Khan of Sultanabad
St. Stephen's College, Delhi 6.

BLACK DRONGO FEEDING UNDER A STREETLIGHT

A Black Drongo was observed feeding on insects that gathered around a streetlight in Roorkee (U.P.) one evening from 7 to 8 p.m. The sun had set at 6.18 p.m. that evening and the 6 day old moon was obscured by clouds most of the time. A very gentle breeze was blowing.

The Drongo was perched on telegraph wires passing under the streetlight. From this perch it periodically flew towards the light to take insects on the wing. There was a mass of insects flying around the light, but the bird seemed to take only select-ed ones.

At 8 p.m. the breeze quickened a little. The drongo flew away, and soon afterwards there were no more insects flying around the light.

Joseph George

ARRIVALS OF ROSY PASTORS AND OTHER MIGRATORY
BIRDS AT JASDAN (GUJARAT)

Mrs. Ganguli's note on the arrival of the Rosy Pastors in Delhi in the Newsletter for November 1962 is the first information we have this autumn about the arrival dates of migratory birds into India. I hope more readers will send in their observations. Arrival dates of some migratory birds here are as follows:

Rosy Pastors: The first birds - 5 in all including 4 adults and 1 juvenile - seen on 24.vii.62; 22 birds seen on 25.vii.62; 60 to 70 on 9.viii.62. Increasing in numbers thereafter.

Sykes Tree Warbler: One bird seen on 24.viii.62; several on 27.viii.62.

Harriers sp.?: Two in immature plumage on 27.viii.62

Kashmir Roller: First bird on 27.viii.62. This bird is an autumn passage migrant here and practically all the birds had gone by mid October. The last bird, a solo, was seen on 3.xi.62.

Orphean Warbler: 2 birds on 28.viii.62

Spotted Flycatchers: First birds on 28.viii.62

Cuckoo (Cuculus canorus): First bird on 1.ix.62

European Hoopoe: First seen 4.ix.62

Tree Pipit: 6 birds on 4.ix.62
Wryneck: 1 bird on 4.ix.62
Lesser Whitethroat: 1 seen on 5.ix.62; several on 6.ix.62
Tawny Pipits: Several on 6.ix.62
Indian Whitethroat: One bird on 7.ix.62
Greynecked Bunting: 7 birds on 7.ix.62
Collared Bush Chat (Saxicola torquata): One on 7.ix.62
Striolated Bunting: Two on 9.ix.62
Blackheaded Yellow Bunting: A flock of 15 on 9.ix.62
Redbreasted Flycatcher: First bird seen on 9.ix.62
Green Willow Warbler: Two on 9.ix.62
Pale Brown Shrike: First seen on 12.ix.62
Blue Rock Thrush: One bird on 12.ix.62
Yellow Wagtail (Motacilla flava): One on 12.ix.62; ten on 20.ix.62
Pied Wheatear (Oenanthe picata): One on 12.ix.62
Bluecheeked Bee-eater: Small flock on 14.ix.62
Common Crane: A flock seen flying overhead on 16.ix.62
Black Redstart: One on 17.ix.62
Sparrowhawk: Two on 19.ix.62
Hobby: One on 19.ix.62
Common Swallow: Two on 20.ix.62
Kestrel: One on 20.ix.62
Rufous Warbler (Erythropgia galactotes): One on 22.ix.62
Grasshopper Warbler (Locustella naevia): Two on 24.ix.62
Short-toed Lark: Small flock on 27.ix.62
Rosefinch: One on 29.ix.62.

Yuvraj Shivrajkumar
Jasdan

NEST OF WIRETAILED SWALLOW IN SATARA DISTRICT,
WESTERN MAHARASHTRA

On 14th November I had a chance to come across the nest of a Wiretailed Swallow (Hirundo smithii).

It was a saucer-shaped bracket secured on a rock in the river bank. It was about 6 ft. from the water level. The place was well shaded by the bushes and was cool and dark.

The nest bracket attached against a depression in the rock had a small circular hole from below which was more or less in the centre. The outer side was made of mud balls placed close together. The inner side was comparatively smooth. There was a pad of rootlets with one or two feathers and some hair in the centre.

I saw two young ones in the nest. They had opened their eyes,

wings were well developed, and I thought they could fly-off with -in two to three days.

These young ones showed a remarkable plumage difference from their parents. The dorsal side was black in general and the ventral white. There was a light brown patch on the throat. The plumage was comparatively dull. There was no metallic shining and no sign of wires were found at the tail.

The table below gives the differences of plumage of the adults and young.

	Adult	Young
Head	Chestnut cap	Black
Dorsal	Shining blue	Dull black
Ventral	White	White
Throat	White	Light brown
Wires	Present	Absent

K. Janakiraman
Kelghar Camp

THE SWALLOW ROOST AT MAHIM CAUSEWAY, BOMBAY

From the time the first Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) of the 1962 inward migration was seen in Bombay on 26 September morning, a watch was kept in the evenings on week-ends at the mangrove patch at Mahim Causeway (Salsette Island, Bombay) where about 400 swallows were netted, ringed, and examined for ticks under the BNHS/WHO Bird Migration Field Project in February last.

The watch was however futile for even those swallows that hawked insects over the creek near by were not observed to make for this roost. Tracking evening flights of the swallows suggested that roost sites existed somewhere beyond Kurla (NE. of Mahim Causeway), and to the south of Bombay in Colaba.

Subsequently on 18 November when watching an evening flight of these birds from Khar (N. Bombay) between about 5.45 and 6, the ultimate direction they flew in batches led to the suspicion that the Mahim Causeway mangrove patch may again be in occupation. The vagaries of public transport, however, prevented reaching

Mahim in time to investigate.

However, the suspicion was confirmed on the 19th when I accompanied Dr. Salim Ali to this roost. The swallows started arriving in small batches over the roost at about 6 p.m. At about 6.10 p.m. flocks from all directions were seen to converge over the roost. Without much circling about, the birds started dropping in for the night's repose. The streaming-in from the north (observed last February) was present, though it was neither so dense nor so prolonged as it was then. The overall numbers of birds were also smaller. But the roost was just beginning to form, and the people around who knew our purpose at the mangroves informed us that the birds had started coming in from 4 to 5 days before. Thus, this roost which was more or less suddenly and completely abandoned by the birds about 22 February, began to be reoccupied on or about 14 November, i.e. after approximately 265 days.

The dropping-in of the flocks continued from 6.10 to about 6.18 p.m., and the late comers darted in singly with a flight reminding one of a frightened bird. By 6.20 p.m. all the birds had settled and not a single swallow could be seen in the sky there-after. A point worth noting is the appearance of pipistrelle bats in the vicinity immediately after the swallows complete roost occupation.

The frightened flight of the late comers, referred to earlier, had been responsible for the search and location of this roost in February last.

Readers who may be taking part in the future ringing activities at this roost should interest themselves in noting down the timings of the daily arrival of the birds and completion of roost occupation.

Dr. Salim Ali held a small scale netting session on 21st November at this roost. With three nets in operation 66 swallows were caught. One of these carried a Bombay Natural History Society ring (A-9336) placed on its right leg 9 months earlier in February 1962.

In an attempt to observe the daily movements of individuals, and shiftings of this roost, the captured birds are being marked with a red dye on their breast. Birdwatchers are requested to write in and inform the date, time, and place they encounter such marked birds.

J.S. Serrao

REVIEW

THE MIGRATIONS OF BIRDS. By Jean Dorst. Translated from the French by Constance D. Sherman, with a foreword by Roger Tory Peterson. pp. xix plus 476 (9" x 6"). London, 1962. Heinemann. Price 50s.

It was generous of Heinemann to send this book for review. It is the most comprehensive study of bird migration ever published, and the manner in which the facts are presented is likely to appeal as much to the amateur ornithologist as to the expert in the field.

In the Foreword, Roger Tory Peterson says 'European ornithologists need no introduction to Jean Pierre Dorst. No one is better qualified to speak with authority about the involved problems of bird migration and to take the whole world in its stride.'

Human beings have been interested in bird migration since the days of Aristotle. But it is curious that though people have in the past, without any technical equipment, made such amazingly accurate observations of the stars in their courses some observers have been so wide off the mark with regard to the phenomena of bird migration.

For instance in 1555 Olaus Magnus, Archbishop of Upsala wrote: 'Several authors have written at length about the inestimable facts of nature, have described how swallows often fly from one country to another travelling to a warm climate for the winter months, but they have not mentioned the denizens of northern regions which are often pulled from the water by fishermen in a large ball. They cling beak to beak, wing to wing, foot to foot having bound themselves together in the first days of autumn in order to hide amid canes and reeds. It has been observed that when spring comes they return joyously to their old nests or build new ones according to the dictates of nature. Occasionally young fishermen unfamiliar with these birds will bring up a large ball and carry it to a stove where heat dissolves it into swallow

Similar fanciful theories were really given up only when H.C.C. Mortensen, a Danish Ornithologist, developed the technique of banding birds towards the close of the last century. This technique has now developed to such an extent that millions of birds are ringed every year and their migration routes are mapped accurately by relentless band of birdwatchers throughout the Old and the New World.

Each species of bird has its predetermined migration route. Some go south by one route and come back to their breeding grounds in the north by another. In some cases the southward travel is done

in batches, some birds taking a more westerly route and some a more easterly one. In this book the author has described in detail the migration routes of practically all the bird families

The pattern of migration seems bewildering but in the case of some species at least there is a very definite reason for birds following the routes that they actually do. A classic example is furnished by loons 'the best known being the black-throated diver or Arctic loon (Gavia arctica) (Bodenstein and Schüz, 1944). This bird is dependent on open water for food and also for security, as it cannot take off from the ground because of its heavy body and the rearward position of its feet. These factors determine its migrations. Arctic loons from northern Russia migrate in autumn to the Black Sea, then south and south-west, but in spring they have their winter range in a north-west and north-north-west direction, towards eastern Prussia and the Baltic Sea. A little later, they fly north-east and east, thus completing a necessary loop in their migration because Russian lakes and ponds are ice-bound at the beginning of their spring flight, so the birds have to follow a more western route.'

The manner of flight of a bird is of course a very important factor in determining the route it takes. Birds with a flapping flight like the Golden Plover manage to cross vast expanses of water without difficulty. Birds which rely on air currents for gliding avoid the shortest stretches of water over which these air currents are not available. Pelagic birds like petrels and albatrosses do manage to glide on their long narrow wings over the high seas and come to land only to nest. The basic principle of their flight involves wind velocities at different altitudes and the birds can cover great distances with no real exertion and no apparent fatigue.

Strange circumstances have produced information about migration of birds. 'In various parts of Europe storks have been found with African native arrows lodged in their flesh without crippling the birds. These arrows characteristic in shape permit fairly close identification of the locality where the bird was shot and incidentally they indicated the regions the migrants must have crossed.'

In the conclusion to the book the author says that though in the last 50 years significant strides have been made towards solving the mysteries of migration and learning about the orientation, and the physiology of migratory impulse, the fundamental courses of migration are still like a few guide posts planted in an almost virgin forest. He warns that we must be on

guard against the over simplified explanations which have been advanced ever since mankind became interested in ornithology. However, after going through this book one certainly gets the feeling of knowing a great deal about the theories of migration which hold the field today.

The book is profusely illustrated with maps and charts, and these make it much easier to follow the text than it otherwise would have been. 50 shillings is a lot of money, but it is not too much for this book.

Z.F.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Notice

2nd Ordinary Yearly Meeting of Subscribers to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Notice is given that the 2nd Ordinary Yearly Meeting of subscribers to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers will be held at 4 p.m. on Sunday, the 23rd December 1962, at the residence of Zafar Futchally, 32-A, Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58.

A g e n d a

1. To elect a Chairman of the meeting
2. To receive a report from the Editor about the circulation, subscription, and finances of the Newsletter
3. To elect an Editorial Board and Editor for 1963, and to decide on the general policy for the coming year
4. To discuss the nature and date of the annual bird watching competition on the lines held last year
5. Any other business brought forward with the permission of the Chair.

By order of the Editorial Board

Zafar Futchally

CORRESPONDENCE

Bee-eaters

Concerning the note on the bee-eaters in the Newsletter, since preparing the note I had the opportunity to see large numbers of juvenile Common Green Bee-eaters in the Delhi area. These differ from the adults described in the paper in that their throat is yellowish (instead of blue), the narrow breast band is absent, and the central tail feathers are not elongated.

I have asked Mrs. Ganguli to comment on the juvenile Bluecheck-ed Bee-eaters which she and I saw together in Delhi after the paper was prepared. As Hutton (Birds about Delhi) suggested, the juveniles of the Bluecheck and Bluetailed are best distinguished by the company they keep (i.e. the adults). The juvenile Bluechecks do not have the bluish-white forehead, are a duller green, are coloured differently below, and lack (when they are young) the elongated central tail feathers. Their cry, which we heard as adults caught insects to feed the young, is a prolonged affair, totally different from the short call of the adults.

Sept. 22, 1962

Julian P. Donahue
237 Gunson, East Lansing, Michigan, USA.

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Bird Notes

I paid a short visit to India in 1957 and have some notes of the birds I saw in the Kaira District (Gujarat State), and around Vrindaban (near Mathura) and Agra. I will write them up and will let you have them. Also from time to time if there is any bird news in this country which may be of interest to readers in India, particularly relating to birds that are seen in both countries I will be glad to send you notes.

Nov. 5, 1962.

Sydney K. Reeves
Surrey, England.

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Review of BHARAT KE PAKSHI

I have seen the review of my book 'Bharat ke Pakshi' in the October issue of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers, a journal which I have been reading with very great interest and also profiting by. I am sorry to say that the sweeping remarks of the reviewer (who has chosen to keep his identity undisclosed) has simply amazed me I have clearly stated in my Introduction that the book neither claims to be a catalogue of birds nor a book of reference; it has been written only with a view to create an interest in the

mind of the lay reader in the birds of the country. The reviewer says that I have not given the correct description of the Pied Crested Cuckoo. I wonder if the description is incorrect; it might be insufficient. I have said that the bird is 'bilkul kala' which only means that it is of absolute black colour, not interspersed with spots as several other birds are and as opposed to the Hawk-Cuckoo which is ashy-grey. In this connection I might mention that it has been my practice, largely, to give only a few identification features and not go in for technical details (for which the reader has to look up scholarly books like those of Mr. Salim Ali or Mr. Whistler) as it is in consonance with that policy that I have said about the cuckoo that it is absolute black and has a crest, and shine on its colour.

Oct. 20, 1962

R.P.N. Sinha, M.P.
New Delhi

[If the reviewer objected to the Pied Crested Cuckoo being described as 'bilkul kala' he was perfectly entitled to do so.

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Birds of Prey - Identification

I am finding great difficulty in the identification of some birds of prey which I see in Palghar. Male Pale Hen Harrier can be identified but female Pale Hen Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, Hen Harrier, Pied Harrier, and the Blackwinged Kite can not be identified by me, in spite of help from books. Can you throw some light on the easy identification of these birds?

Nov. 4, 1962

B.R. Dave
Medical Officer, Primary Health Centre
Palgarh, Dist. Thana

[The identification of birds of prey in the field is certainly not easy. The difficulty is increased by the fact that many of them, apart from marked individual variation, go through a number of different plumage stages from young to adult. Even with experience it is sometimes only possible to guess the identity by a process of elimination. This implies a knowledge of the species normally to be expected in the area where one is watching.

The harriers most likely to be met with in winter in the Palgarh area (about 75 miles N. of Bombay) are the Pale Harrier (Circus macrourus) and Montagu's Harrier (C. pygargus). What the Correspondent has taken for the Hen Harrier is more likely to be the Pale. The Hen Harrier (C. cyaneus) occurs mostly in northern

India and may safely be left out of consideration here. The Pied Harrier (C. melanoleucus), as far as I know, has been recorded only once in the Bombay neighbourhood and is also unlikely to be seen normally.

The adult male Pale Harrier is pale grey above, white below, with black tips to its pointed wings. Montagu's Harrier is a darker grey above, and in addition to the black wing-tip it has a blackish bar across the secondaries which also shows from below in flight.

The brown adult females and young birds of both species are confusingly alike in the field, and I have personally seldom felt quite convinced of their individual identity. However, in the Pale Harrier the pale facial markings are altogether more conspicuous. The rufous ruff is usually much paler and more prominent, forming a pale curved line behind the ear coverts. Underparts much paler rufous-white and less heavily streaked than in Montagu's which is darker both above and below, with a lesser amount of white in the upper tail coverts.

In the hand the longer tarsus of the Pale Harrier (above 65 mm. vs. under 65 mm. in Montagu's) is diagnostic.

The Blackwinged Kite is easily distinguished from the males of the grey harriers being much smaller in size and with a markedly shorter tail. The black patch on the wing is not situated at the tip but on the shoulder, closer to the body. If a bird is watched for a few moments, its hovering habit will soon reveal its identity.

The adult male Marsh Harrier (Circus aeruginosus) is unmistakable with its brown body and silver-grey wings and tail. Young birds and females are brown, and though of lighter build than the Pariah Kite may sometimes be confused with it. However, the rounded tail (vs. forked in the Kite) and the whitish (cream coloured) crown will readily distinguish the harrier.

* * * * * - S.A.7

Speed of flight of birds

I was interested in Mr. Joseph George's paper on the 'Speed of flight of birds' (August issue). I might adduce that on 27 December 1961, in Delhi, I clocked a Ring Dove (Streptopelia decaocto) as cruising with a ground speed of 35 m.p.h. The timing device was a moving car.

Julian P. Donahue

Aug. 20, 1962

Zafar Futehally

Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers
Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58